



**PHD**

**The role of bridging and linking social capital in the development of the Northern Ireland women's movement after the 1998 Peace Agreement**

Priest, Sarah

*Award date:*  
2015

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

**Alternative formats**

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:  
[openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk)

Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Access is subject to the above licence, if given. If no licence is specified above, original content in this thesis is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Any third-party copyright material present remains the property of its respective owner(s) and is licensed under its existing terms.

**Take down policy**

If you consider content within Bath's Research Portal to be in breach of UK law, please contact: [openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk) with the details. Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

**The role of bridging and linking social capital in the development of the Northern Ireland women's movement after the 1998 Peace Agreement**

Sarah Elizabeth Priest

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies

30 January 2015

**COPYRIGHT** Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with the author. A copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that they must not copy it or use material from it except as permitted by law or with the consent of the author

**RESTRICTIONS ON USE** This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation with effect from 30 January 2015.

Signed on behalf of the Faculty/School of Humanities and Social Sciences:

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to thank my supervisors, Professor Anna Bull and Professor Hanna Diamond, for their invaluable guidance, support and critical insight. I am also very grateful for the financial support received through the University Research Studentship from the Politics, Languages and International Studies department of the University of Bath; and to the Europe Centre at Monash University for hosting me during my Erasmus Mundus scholarship in Melbourne in 2012.

I am hugely grateful to all the women that I spoke to in Northern Ireland who gave me their time – this thesis would not have been possible without their generosity and enthusiasm. I particularly thank Bronagh Hinds, who has been a source of support and encouragement from my initial interest in this topic as a Masters student at the University of Bath and intern at the Women's National Commission, and throughout this project. Margaret Ward and Lynn Carvill, respectively the former Director and Women's Sector Lobbyist of the WRDA, were kind enough to meet with me several times and share meeting minutes and other documentation. The NIWEP Committee, especially Kate McCullough, Liz Law and Ann Marie Gray, have been incredibly supportive throughout this project; offering me their time, a desk in their office during my field research, welcoming me to meetings and sharing documents and information. I also thank Emma Patterson-Bennett for her support, hospitality and above all, her friendship.

Former and current colleagues at the WNC and NAWO have been of significant support at a personal level, and have contributed in substantial ways to the research process; offering me invaluable opportunities to work with and alongside the Northern Ireland women's movement, and deepening my understanding of feminism and advocacy – I have learned a great deal from them all.

I am sincerely grateful to friends and family for their care and encouragement over the past five years – particularly my parents; I am incredibly thankful for their constant support and belief.

Finally, and most of all, to my partner Carl Greaves, for his practical support (as graphic designer-in-chief), willingness to up sticks to Melbourne and back again, unwavering encouragement and remarkable patience – thank you for everything.

## **Abstract**

This thesis uses a feminist social capital approach to explore how the women's movement has sought to position itself in a post-Good Friday/Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland in order to influence policy.

Scholars have charted the development of a coherent women's movement during the Troubles; this thesis frames this development and their ability to establish bridging ties in a conflict and post-conflict State using a social capital analysis. It builds on existing scholarship about the development and structure of the Women's Coalition to argue that this was an attempt to replicate bridging ties at the level of elected politics in order to gender democracy and advance equality. Following the NIWC's electoral failure, this study identifies and evaluates the women's movement's strategic re-direction to effect greater gender equality through policy influence, based upon the development of strong bridging social capital founded upon cross-movement coalitions in the context of a gender neutral State narrative and understanding of equality primarily framed in sectarian terms.

The thesis argues that the women's movement works to establish linking social capital as a means of accessing policy-makers and asserting influence at the Northern Ireland, Westminster, European and UN levels to advance their agenda. This analysis is augmented by the role of leadership agency in 'activating' bridging and linking ties; a core group of leaders are at the heart of elaborating and advancing the movement's strategic engagement with policy-making through a flexible, networked structure.

This thesis demonstrates the value in applying a feminist social capital approach to an analysis of women's movement efforts to work collectively to influence and gender policy-making. The role of movement leaders is crucial in converting social capital into strategic action for social change, but can create fragility by rendering the movement highly dependent on key individuals and hindering its ability to sustain policy-making influence.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	ii
<b>Abstract</b>	iii
<b>Abbreviations of frequently-used terms</b>	vi
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b>	
1.1: The outline of the thesis and research questions	1
1.2: Methodology	4
a. Feminist theory as applied methodology	7
b. Feminist Participatory Action Research	10
c. FPAR and leadership agency	13
d. Conclusion	18
<b>Chapter 2. Theoretical approaches and debates</b>	
2.1: Introduction: Women's activism in a divided society	20
2.2: Feminist theory	21
2.2a: Women's mobilisation and conflict/post-conflict	24
2.3: Social capital theory	27
2.4: Gendering Social Capital	32
2.5: A Feminist Social Capital Approach for Northern Ireland	37
2.6: Agency, leadership and social capital in the women's movement	39
2.7: Conclusion	42
<b>Figure 1</b>	
Channels for influencing policy-making in Northern Ireland: The women's movement's bridging and linking social capital before the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.	
<b>Chapter 3. From bonding to bridging ties: the development of the women's movement and Northern Ireland Women's Coalition</b>	
3.1: Introduction	43
3.2: 'Accidental activists' and the development of the women's movement	44
3.3: The politicisation of the women's movement: the road to the Peace Talks	49
3.4: Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and women in elected politics	51
3.5: The context of a developing government social capital agenda	58
3.6: Conclusion	62
<b>Figure 2</b>	
Channels for influencing policy-making in Northern Ireland: the women's movement's bridging and linking social capital since the Belfast/Good Friday agreement	
<b>Chapter 4. The electoral failure of the Women's Coalition and the development of a new strategy</b>	
4.1: Introduction	64

4.2: Scholarship	64
4.3: Legacy of the NIWC and the women's movement in a post-Agreement Northern Ireland	69
4.4: Post-Women's Coalition strategic adaptation in a new equality landscape	
4.5: The new equality framework	75
4.6: Conclusion	85
	88
<b>Chapter 5. Strategic engagement: the development of linking social capital with the Northern Ireland Government</b>	
5.1: Introduction	
5.2: The relevance of linking social capital in a Northern Ireland context	90
5.3: The Northern Ireland government's social capital agenda	90
5.4: Women's movement engagement with the Government's social capital agenda and formal mechanisms for linking ties	93
	95
5.5: The implications for the women's movement of engaging with the Government's agenda	103
5.6: Establishing linking ties in a neo-liberal, gender neutral policy-making context	
5.7: Conclusion	107
	115
<b>Chapter 6. Strategic engagement beyond the border: linking social capital at the UK, European and UN levels</b>	
6.1: Introduction	
6.2: Engagement with the international arena before and during the Women's Coalition	117
	117
6.3: Linking ties with the British government	
6.4: Linking ties at the European level	119
6.5: Linking ties to the UN and engagement with the international gender equality agenda	127
6.5a: CEDAW	
6.5b: UNSCR 1325	132
6.6: Conclusion	139
	145
<b>Chapter 7. Conclusion</b>	
7.1: Restating the research questions	
7.2: The research gap and answering the research questions	146
7.3: Implications for policy and theoretical debates	146
7.4: Suggestions for further research	149
	152
<b>Bibliography</b>	154
<b>Appendix</b>	
List of Interviews	176

## **Abbreviations of frequently-used terms**

BFN	Belfast Feminist Network
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DSD	(Northern Ireland) Department for Social Development
GEO	(UK) Government Equalities Office
NAWO	National Alliance of Women's Organisations
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
NIWC	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
NIWEP	Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
TWN	Training for Women Network
UKJCW	United Kingdom Joint Committee on Women
UNSCR 1325	United National Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
WCRP	Women's Centres Regional Partnership
WNC	Women's National Commission
WRDA	Women's Resource and Development Agency
WSN	Women's Support Network

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1. The structure of the thesis and research questions

In an article about Northern Irish trade union leader and human rights activist Inez McCormack, Beatrix Campbell writes that she, 'put change as the condition of peace, recognition of disadvantage and redress as the condition of reconciliation. That may sound modest, but it was seriously radical' (Campbell, 2014). These words could equally describe the story of a women's movement which developed during conflict to demand radical reforms and challenge the binary, male-dominated narrative of the Troubles. The development of political consciousness amongst women within Protestant and Catholic communities during the Troubles, leading to increasing expressions of solidarity across the ethnonational divide and recognition of shared experiences, was a remarkable process and has been the subject of scholarly interest (Evason, 1991: 52-53 and Hinds, 1999: 112) and shared learning in other areas of conflict.

There is a comprehensive and engaging literature addressing the development of the Northern Ireland women's movement during the Troubles from both scholars and feminist activists themselves (and often those for whom there is no distinction between the two); charting the influence of feminist activism and wider transformations in the development of a politics based on identities other than ethnonational affiliation. Dissatisfaction with the political status quo grew in response to a political system overwhelmingly concerned with the security situation at the expense of social provision, and women mobilised within the voluntary sector to meet local needs of childcare, housing, health and support services (Roulston, 1997; Wilford, 1996: 47 and McCartney, 1995: 222). Similarly, women engaged in the civil rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s, which was to seed the later development of the women's movement as awareness about civil rights developed the understanding of women's rights (McWilliams, 1995: 18).

This process led women to develop a political consciousness as women through local activism, serving as a foundation for strong bonds at the grassroots level and joint efforts across the ethnonational divide. This unique and formative development represents the starting point and underpinning rationale for this thesis. Moreover, the remarkable story of the establishment and successes of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) has been told and evaluated (among others, Fearon, 1999; Murtagh, 2008; Rynder, 2002 and Cowell-Meyers, 2014). However, there is little scholarship analysing post-NIWC women's activism in Northern Ireland. This thesis builds on the work of feminist scholars and activists to explore the women's movement beyond formal party politics: it considers that the post-NIWC period represents the further development of the Women's Coalition's spirit of innovation and transversal politics to gender democracy and influence policy-making in Northern Ireland; building on lessons learned by developing a system that incorporates flexibility and relies upon strategic positioning of key leaders.

This study mobilises a feminist social capital approach which asserts the role of women in generating social capital, and which uses the concept of bonding, bridging and linking social ties to frame and explore women's activism. Bonding social capital concerns the nature of relationships and levels of connectedness within communities; bridging ties refer to the nature



and extent of relationships between communities, and linking social capital is characterised by connections between those with differing levels of power or social status such as links between the political elite and civil society. It makes a strong case for the value of a social capital approach in the study of women's movements, particularly as a way to counter the 'disciplining discourses' predicated by states and masculinist scholarship which obscure the social capital generated by women-centred collective action. This feminist social capital approach is supplemented by a consideration of the role of leadership agency in relation to the Northern Ireland context. It is an approach which is under-theorised in both the social capital and feminist literatures, and allows more effective analysis and identification of transformative moments and strategic re-directions. In this context, a focus on leadership agency can facilitate a more cogent exploration of how bridging and linking social capital can be 'activated' by groups to engender desired outcomes.

The analysis probes how the women's movement has sought to position itself in a post-Good Friday/Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland in order to influence policy, exploring the strategic re-direction taken – and the role of leadership in this process – after the Women's Coalition's electoral defeat. As 'movement qua party' (Cowell-Meyers, 2014), the NIWC delivered significant gains for the women's movement and for politics in Northern Ireland more generally. However, its electoral slump demonstrated that the women's movement's formal political presence in the Assembly was unsustainable. The primary research question of this study therefore asks: how did the women's movement react and change its agenda following electoral failure, when its formal political presence via the Coalition was no longer sustainable?

The answer to this question, this thesis will argue, lies in the development of a highly networked structure founded upon strong bridging ties, and which relies upon core leaders with the authority and expertise to exercise agency on the movement's behalf. A number of further questions flow from this: having established certain structures to effect strategic re-direction, has the women's movement subsequently mobilised its bridging links in order to engage politically as a collective with policy-makers (via linking social capital)? Following the post-Women's Coalition strategic re-direction, has the women's movement established linking ties with supranational political institutions and international forums, and if so, how and why has it done so? To what extent has it utilised this linking social capital to increase linking ties at home, and if these linking ties do exist, how and why do they help build bridging ties amongst women, by contributing to the development of shared goals? What role has leadership played in developing this international strategy?

Two sets of literature form the basis of this study's theoretical approach and are discussed in Chapter 2: feminist theory and its approach to conflict/post-conflict, and social capital theory. Feminist scholars have problematised the tendency of traditional security studies to view women primarily as victims, and to obscure the diversity of their experiences and contributions in and to conflict/post-conflict and ongoing processes of peace-building. The emphasis in some of this feminist literature on the at-times empowering nature of conflict for women's agency, often through the mobilisation of women at the grassroots and across ethnic and other divides, is an important theoretical foundation for this study of the Northern Ireland women's movement. Meanwhile, just as feminist security analyses can uncover the agency and mobilisation of women in conflict/post-conflict, social capital theory reveals the importance of social ties and 'bottom-up' activism in facilitating development and civic participation. It shifts

the analytical focus from the behaviour of individuals to the pattern of relations between agents, social units and institutions.

The Northern Ireland government has adopted an approach which draws upon aspects of social capital theory for its perceived utility in framing efforts to ameliorate ethnonational divisions. Feminist critiques of traditional social capital theory, which note the tendency to assume a universal male citizen and overlook women's social networks, are therefore a useful starting point for deploying a feminist approach to address gaps in social capital theory as it relates to the women's movement in general, and to a social capital debate in Northern Ireland framed overwhelmingly in ethnonational terms. This thesis further enhances the analysis by integrating a consideration of leadership and agency. Analysis of the role and influence of women's movement leaders is largely absent from feminist literature; leadership agency is particularly salient for the Northern Ireland movement and can enrich a social capital approach, particularly in exploring its impact on linking ties.

Chapter 3 reviews scholarship of the development of a women's movement in Northern Ireland within a society experiencing and emerging from intra-community conflict, in which women mobilised at the grassroots level and in social movement organisations (see among others, McWilliams, 1995; Galligan et al, 1999; McDonough, 1996; Rooney, 2002), within the context of a state transitioning to a new political arrangement and seeking to embed peace. As explored at length in this thesis, 'community relations', underpinned by social capital theory, has become a dominant framework for mediating the relationship between the Northern Ireland government and the voluntary sector. There is a strong literature that situates this development alongside the Government's adoption of a social capital-oriented community relations agenda and within an international policy context, and analyses the impact of such developments on the women's movement (see Cairns, Van Til and Williamson, 2003; Campbell et al, 2008; Morrow, 2006).

The term 'women's movement' will be used in this study to describe the networks of women's groups that exist currently in Northern Ireland because, as Monica McWilliams notes, 'there is quite a widespread ownership of the term amongst the various participants' (McWilliams, 1995: 17). Scholars have argued that the women's movement in Northern Ireland has developed a way of operating collectively across difference (see Byrne, 2009; McWilliams, 1995; Fearon, 1999 and Murtagh, 2008), through a transversal politics of emphasising dialogue and coalition, while recognising differences with respect (Yuval-Davis, 1999). The male-dominated political system and paucity of debate around the issues upon which women's groups worked and lobbied can be said to have contributed to a shared agenda amongst women's groups, to the extent that the Women's Coalition, a political party that emerged from women's activism in civil society to contest a place for women at the Peace Talks, could become a reality (see Rooney, 1995; Rynder, 2002 and Hope, 2006). The Coalition as a political party was a short-lived project that sought to establish ties and influence through formal political engagement.

Following the failure of the Coalition to embed at this level, this study argues that the women's movement has refocused its goals away from engaging directly at the formal political level through the formation of women's issue-oriented political parties, and turned instead towards the development of linking ties with policy-makers. Chapter 4 therefore reviews scholarly analysis of the NIWC's electoral collapse, bolstered by interview evidence from leading figures in the Party, and frames its aims and failure using a social capital analysis in order to explore the movement's strategic re-direction upon the disbanding of the NIWC. This

chapter analyses the means by which the post-Women's Coalition movement has established bridging ties that are defined by flexibility and a densely-networked structure, in which leaders are empowered to pursue linking ties to policy-makers, as a recognition that a flexible approach that capitalises upon the simultaneous heterogeneity and expertise within the movement, rather than formalised and rigid systems, may be the most effective route to influence policy-making and the advance of the movement's goals.

Chapter 5 interrogates the women's movement's strategic engagement with the Northern Ireland government via linking ties, within the context of the latter's social capital 'good relations' agenda and its pervasive gender neutral approach to policy-making, both of which impact upon the movement's ability to work through linking ties to develop and engage in a meaningful, sustained debate with policy-makers about gender equality. The chapter explores instances of strong agency being deployed by a core group of leaders, who are able to work through highly-networked structures to seek influence, and from which they derive the legitimacy in the eyes of government with which to represent the movement's shared (where such collective positions can be developed) interests. It also considers the influence of newer forms of feminist activism, which are less dependent on established leaders and have the potential to enrich the women's movement in terms of debate, societal reach and generational renewal.

Chapter 6 builds on the discussion in Chapter 5 about the strategic development of linking ties, by exploring the movement's networking efforts beyond the Northern Ireland arena; that is, at the British, European and international levels. The discussion begins with an analysis of the movement's engagement with the Women's National Commission (WNC) as the primary means by which it sought to influence Westminster, and assesses where the WNC's abolition has left the women's movement's linking ties at this level. Chapter 3 sets out the importance of the European level through the EU's PEACE funds, and Chapter 6 further develops this discussion by considering the current role of Europe and the extent to which the women's movement, for which the European arena had been of vital importance during the Troubles, now engages at this level. Finally, participation in UN processes and the utilisation of UN gender equality norms is explored, notably as a way to acquire external, supranational legitimacy for core policy aims. Leadership agency is of significant importance to the movement's ability to engage at these levels, marshalling long-standing expertise whilst creating linking ties which rely on a core set of individuals.

Chapter 7 offers some concluding remarks, summarising the arguments, theoretical foundations and methodological approaches of this thesis. It reviews the limitations of the findings, explores their implications for the relevant theoretical debates, and makes some suggestions for further study. Moreover, it makes a strong case for the use of a feminist social capital approach to the analysis of women's movement efforts to influence and gender policy-making, and for considering leadership agency in order to probe transitional and transformational moments.

## **2. Methodology**

This thesis adopted a mixed methodological approach to address the research questions outlined in the previous section. These questions primarily concern issues of internal decision-making processes and methods for undertaking change and strategic re-direction within the women's movement, in which the focus is on processes of change and re-orientation rather

than, for instance, legislative outcomes. As such, the questions are best approached through a combination of participant observation, documentary analysis and interviews. The exploration of post-Women's Coalition transition and bridging ties required interview discussion with movement leaders (notably those who had been leading figures in the NIWC and continued as leaders in women's movement organisations or equality and human rights agencies, such as Bronagh Hinds, Margaret Ward, Ann Hope and Monica McWilliams) to explore and understand the process of strategic change, and reviewing reports and minutes of meetings, particularly related to the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group and other new structures which cultivate bridging links.

To answer research questions related to efforts to establish linking ties to Northern Ireland policy-makers, interviews with leaders were conducted to discuss the role of structures like the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group and Gender Advisory Panel in acting as interlocutors with government with regard to policy; and analysis of Northern Ireland Assembly committee meetings and hearings at which movement leaders were questioned, and government strategies (such as *Together Building a United Community*, OFMDFM, 2013b) which reveal the social capital agenda serving as context for women's movement efforts to influence policy. To answer questions related to efforts to establish linking ties beyond the Northern Ireland level, participant observation was used at WNC meetings and events, women's movement meetings in Belfast and London, and at the 2013 UK government examination by the CEDAW Committee in Geneva, to identify how movement leaders reach decisions and work collaboratively across the Northern Ireland and UK women's movements to seek linking ties. A wide range of WNC, UN, EWL and other related documentation were analysed to map the breadth of women's movement policy inputs.

These methods were supplemented and enhanced through interviews with movement leaders about UK-wide, European and international engagement, notably with NIWEP committee members who are the primary leaders advancing and coordinating action here. The methodology was founded upon a feminist research ethic which will be outlined below. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation – supported by documentary analysis – can provide insights into the motivations and actions of individuals which may not be so easily accessed through other means, enabling the exploration of ideas in a collaborative and open manner, in order to answer these questions and create knowledge that is of benefit to research participants, in line with feminist methodologies and their commitment to social change and equality.

Leadership agency was judged to be a crucial aspect of inquiry at an early stage of research. Participant observation and early familiarity with documents and meetings as part of my professional role at the Women's National Commission (WNC) alerted me to the multiple roles played by various leaders, to the many tasks they had to undertake, and to the interlocking ties which they had established to facilitate engagement. As such, the role of leaders appeared to be a crucial aspect of the movement and one which required thorough consideration. This 'inside knowledge' was further reinforced by arguments from theorists who pointed to the role of social movement leaders in 'activating' communally-held social capital to propel action and mobilisation (among others, Krishna, 2001; Jasper, 2004; Morris, 2000 and Ling and Dale, 2013).

A significant facet of the methodology of this thesis was my role as International Policy Advisor at the WNC from September 2008 – December 2010. The WNC was a non-departmental public body, funded by the Government Equalities Office to represent the voices

of women to the Government. It acted as the 'intermediary' between government and women's organisations in the UK, known as WNC partners. At the time of the WNC's closure in December 2010, it had nearly 700 organisational and individual partners. A key part of my role related to WNC work on UN and EU gender policy, and this was largely structured around a number of annual projects, including the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

A detailed elaboration of the ways in which this brought me into contact with groups and with leaders from the Northern Ireland women's movement will be given later; in this context it is important to note that certain hypotheses were formed about how the movement works together, across the UK and with government, based on interaction through the WNC. In brief, this was largely based on work with certain representatives from the movement in working groups and at events held in London, as well as at events coordinated by the WNC and held in Belfast, at which a wide range of women from the movement were present. Therefore, an integral part of the methodological approach of this study has involved analysis of meetings involving women from the movement in Northern Ireland at which I was both observer and participant as a WNC policy advisor. Further, I also had access to a range of documents relating to WNC work with Northern Ireland partners which have since been evaluated. It is important to note the specific context in which these interactions occurred, and their nature. In the case of events and meetings, these were organised and run by the WNC, with government personnel as co-convenors or participants.

It is important to take into account how my previous interaction with certain women in the movement (usually movement leaders) in Northern Ireland through the WNC impacted upon field research. The women's movement is tightly networked through a number of channels, one of which was the network relationship with the WNC, mediated through the WNC Northern Ireland Commissioner, Bronagh Hinds (and her immediate predecessor, Ann Hope). Therefore, over a two-year period I came into regular contact with Bronagh Hinds, with representatives from NIWEP (Northern Ireland Women's European Platform) who sat on WNC international policy working groups, and with women with whom I worked on a number of occasions whilst running events in Belfast. This prior connection means that when conducting interviews with these women, there was a degree of familiarity and rapport that acted as a foundation for relaxed discussion. To a certain extent, this extended to women with whom I was not yet familiar; the dense networks within the women's movement means that the work of the WNC (through the Northern Ireland Commissioner) had high name recognition amongst women's organisations in Northern Ireland, and the vast majority – and certainly most of the larger organisations – were WNC partners. This may have contributed, therefore, to the establishment of rapport with interviewees and communicating to them a sense of shared purpose.

This also applies (although to a lesser extent) to my role as Coordinator for the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), from January 2013. NAWO is an umbrella organisation for women's groups in England, and is the England member of the UK Joint Committee on Women (UKJCW), comprised of a women's organisation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (NIWEP) respectively, which represent the UK women's movement at the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in Brussels. NAWO therefore has strong reciprocal ties with women's movements in the devolved nations; in reference to Northern Ireland, this relationship is mediated through NIWEP and further underscores NIWEP's leadership position in the women's movement as the outward-facing representative and responsible for the movement's UK-wide relationships (and beyond). Whilst my position at NAWO has involved

less direct contact with the Northern Ireland movement, it has produced a body of email correspondence, particularly related to NIWEP's role as part of the UKJCW and in relation to EWL, interaction at events in London, and more broadly, has provided insight into the Northern Ireland movement's engagement with the UK-wide women's movement and UK Government in the post-WNC arena. Furthermore, I attended the UK government's 2013 CEDAW Examination at the UN in Geneva on behalf of NAWO, and was able to observe and engage with NIWEP and other Northern Ireland representatives in the course of NGO activities at the Session.

#### **a. Feminist theory as applied methodology**

In light of these positions within and alongside the UK women's movement, notions of rapport and reflexivity are central to the methodological approach of this study. Feminist scholars have questioned the 'objectivist neutrality' of traditional social science methodology, arguing that reflexivity is critical when undertaking fieldwork in order to examine and address gender blindness. As Tickner notes, 'whereas personal experience is thought by conventional social science to contaminate a project's objectivity, feminists believe one's awareness of one's personal position in the research process to be a corrective to "pseudo-objectivity" ', a necessary explanation of the researcher's standpoint that can strengthen objectivity (Tickner, 2005: 9). England describes reflexivity as self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher, which can induce new hypotheses about the research questions and an openness to challenges to their theoretical position (England, 1994: 83). This came as part of a wider methodological trend amongst feminist researchers as they questioned the orthodoxies of the research process; namely, what counts as an object of study, relations between researcher and researched, what constitutes data, and legitimate sites of study (Staeheli and Lawson, 1994: 97).

As such, feminist political science has raised fundamental questions about the conceptualisation of politics, including the conventional distinction between public and private and the implications for the scope and boundaries of the political science discipline (Randall, 2002: 129). In questioning the notions of neutrality and objectivity and noting the inherent connection between reason and emotion or subjective interest, feminist scholars have challenged the universal validity of knowledge produced by a male-dominated elite and the way that this has ignored and marginalised women's perspectives and experiences (Gillies and Alldred, 2002: 34). This ties with an emancipatory aim of feminist research, derived from its close connections with the contemporary women's movement. Acker et al argue that the women's movement provided the necessary social basis for legitimation and political support that facilitated women researchers, whilst the latter have often been members of the women's movement (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991: 135).

Reflexivity, therefore, seeks to ensure the production of accountable feminist knowledge by looking reflexively at the processes of knowledge production, noting that all knowledge is produced from a point of view. Furthermore, in their discussion of the feminist-informed research ethic, Ackerly and True describe an inclination for the researcher to interpret her ethical obligation to support the advocacy agenda of her informants through her research question (Ackerly and True, 2008: 700). In seeking to challenge gender blindness, feminist researchers have asserted that women participants should be empowered in the process and that the researcher cannot be neutral in what is deemed to be a political process (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000: 90). In practical terms, this could equate to encouraging the research

participant in an interview to take the lead in deciding what is discussed (Acker et al, 1991: 140). Feminist scholars have therefore argued that the values and expectations that the researcher brings to the work, as well as the research process itself, shape the study (Lynch, 2008: 714). As such, feminist researchers do not claim a single standard of methodological correctness or 'feminist way' to carry out research (Tickner, 2005: 3). There are, however, methodological guidelines that inform feminist research perspectives, notably a commitment to asking feminist questions and building knowledge from women's lives (ibid: 4).

Certainly, then, the feminist research ethic is an appropriate framework with which to approach field research for this study; both in light of its subject matter and intent, namely a contribution to highlighting the under-recognised role of women in promoting and working to advance social capital, equality and women's participation in post-conflict Northern Ireland; and in terms of the perspective and experience that I bring to the study as researcher, based on my social and political beliefs and background of work in the women's movement. As Stacey notes,

Most feminist researchers, committed, at a minimum, to redressing the sexist imbalances of masculinist scholarship, appear to select their research projects on substantive grounds. Personal interests and skills meld, often mysteriously, with collective feminist concerns to determine a particular topic of research, which, in turn, appears to guide the research methods employed in its service (Stacey, 1988: 21).

As such, subject, theory and methods are interrelated. Whilst this position could be construed as a source of bias in the analysis of data that is produced in the course of field study, 'we have to concede that it is precisely these contexts that provide us with their significance in terms of "meaning frames", and which permit us to understand and communicate empirical observations' (Bergman and Coxon, 2005: 3).

Therefore, recognising the absence of neutrality in relation to the research topic as part of the reflexive approach does not detract from the validity of the observations produced, but rather can facilitate understanding between researcher and researched and contribute to the advocacy work of the women being studied. Moreover, Zalewski raises a critical point in relation to the ways in which the Northern Ireland 'problem' is conceptualised in the research process, 'what we might call the default software of liberalism and positivism casts a thick mantle over structures of meaning which then subsequently materialise as irrelevant or tangential', rendering gender in this 'constitution of representations' of the conflict as peripheral and insignificant (Zalewski, 2006: 482). A feminist methodological approach that recognises the absence of absolute frames of reference therefore has particular applicability to the study of Northern Ireland, which has hitherto been dominated by positivist methodological discourses (ibid: 483).

A feminist approach founded upon reflexivity, participation and an awareness of power hierarchies in the research relationship also offers an effective and productive means by which to study social movements like the women's movement; not least in uncovering the activism of women in a society in which the narrative has been so dominated by a 'positivist methodological discourse' that reinforces the masculinist hegemony. 'Conscious reflexivity' about feminist knowledge production processes has been advocated as a way to avoid producing more alienated knowledge which leaves no trace of the conditions of its production or the social conditions from which it arose (Maguire, 2006: 67). Maguire has argued that,

'research is not a neutral tool for the creation of supposedly "apolitical" knowledge' (Maguire, 1987: 24), whilst Taylor notes that feminist scholars have demonstrated the ways in which mainstream social movement theories are based on the exclusion of women's collective action, which creates gaps in theorising social movements (Taylor, 1998: 374). In an account of her doctoral research in Northern Ireland in which she became an active and core member of the Women's Coalition, Canadian academic Robin Whitaker describes her research, in which participant observation became partisan ethnography as her involvement encompassed acting as press officer, member of the Talks team and on the Coalition executive (Whitaker, 2011: 60).

Certainly, it would seem that Whitaker found that, to paraphrase Stacey above, her research interests and skills melded with collective feminist concerns at work in Northern Ireland and guided the research methods she employed; namely, an immersive engagement with her subjects. This integral involvement came from a growing unease that her observation of the early days of the Women's Coalition constituted 'intellectual tourism', and allowed her to use active participation in the peace process as a basis for ethnographic reflection (Whitaker, 2008: 322). She argues for a feminist political model of friendship, 'that emphasises differences between people and also treats the ground between them as plural', allowing for knowledge produced through respectful inter-subjective engagement and analysis (Whitaker, 2011: 64). Indeed, 'the kind of "insider" knowledge gained from alternative methodologies that allow us to "enter the field" can result not only in the development of situated knowledges located in a particular time and space...but they can open possibilities for more general and universal theoretical visions' (Taylor, 1998: 375). However, this positioning as an 'insider' (to a greater or lesser extent) ties to the implied criticism that 'loyalty always interferes with good judgement and so makes for bad politics – or bad ethnography' (Whitaker, 2011: 64).

This criticism of the methodological foundations of this kind of research is one that 'activist'-oriented scholars have long faced. As Zalewski notes, the appropriate relationship between scholarly work and the 'real world' is a vexed one (Zalewski, 2006: 481), and feminist researchers of Northern Ireland have framed their work as impacting on orthodox narratives (ibid: 493). This fits with a central tenet of feminist research, 'if feminist scholarship begins by asking questions informed by women's exclusion in the world and from the standpoint of a personal life that has yet to be taken seriously by others, the aim of feminist research is to expand science and culture to create knowledge that makes a difference in the world' (Taylor, 1998: 358). Whilst Whitaker's approach to social movement research was particularly immersive, it corresponds with a feminist approach of using strategies which involve activist community organisations in designing the study and analysing the results (ibid: 371). As Hale has argued, social movements carry unique knowledge of their immediate struggles, and scholars aligned with these movements are at times able to share in that insight – evident in the depth of Whitaker's insights into the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (Hale, 2008: 21).

This desire to make a 'difference in the world' suggests an alignment to certain groups that does not, it has been argued, undermine scholarly rigour, 'alignments with specific groups of people...fosters a commitment to listen closely to them, to assign special agency to their agency and standpoint', reaching knowledge that it would otherwise be difficult to uncover (Hale, 2008: 4). Hale argues that methodological rigour is built into activist or social movement research in a demanding and stringent way, by the enjoinder to ensure that the research is comprehensible to and works for the specific group of people who helped to formulate the research goals (ibid: 12). A feminist methodological approach to the study of the Northern Ireland women's movement therefore has grounding in both theoretical and case-specific



scholarship. Indeed, whilst my approach in this study was not as embedded as Whitaker's, it did proceed from a prior level of professional engagement and affinity with the Northern Ireland women's movement that engendered a commitment to 'listen closely' and recognise 'special agency.'

## **b. Feminist Participatory Action Research**

We make no pretense of neutrality, of unemotional involvement. Our concern is to be reflexive and explicit about our subjectivities because of their role in the knowledge we construct. Our research also explicitly aims to contribute to social change for women (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000: 103)

Feminist scholars wishing to impact upon orthodox narratives and contribute to social change have debated and continue to debate the best methodological approaches to facilitate this dual imperative of knowledge creation and transformational change, whilst simultaneously working with and supporting (as research subjects) both the empowerment of women and work of women's movements. Whilst there is no single methodology or theoretical base of feminist scholarship, it is nevertheless committed to, 'a liberatory, transformational project that is essential to any definition of feminism and feminist scholarship. At its core, feminism and its scholarship is a political movement for social, structural and personal transformation' (Maguire, 2006: 61). As Gatenby and Humphries explain, feminist researchers seeking to develop such a method have found a feminist participatory action research (FPAR) approach to provide a foundation which is 'collaborative, liberatory and ethical' (2000: 89). Participatory Action Research (PAR) from a feminist theoretical foundation builds upon PAR's commitment to producing knowledge that is of use to, and reflects the lived experiences of, a particular group; often groups who are marginalised, vulnerable or working in fields related to social justice and equality, and in the process of engagement as equal collaborators able to determine the subject and direction of the research, to engender awareness-raising and empowerment (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000).

Maguire noted that whilst participatory research thus far had seen, 'women and gender as focus for analysis...ignored, minimised or marginalised' (1987: 52), feminist theory and practice had the potential to develop PAR. Indeed, 'many feminists have long believed that research should empower the women involved, that the researcher cannot possibly be neutral, and that research is a political process' (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000: 90), and as such, FPAR has developed as a means by which feminist scholars seek to reconcile these principles with the imperatives of research, alongside a mix of practices often seen in feminist research like that of reflexivity as a means of being present in dialogue with others (Burgess, 2006: 427), interviewing and focus groups. PAR has been described as having a particular role in creating, 'social spaces where people can make meaningful contributions to their own well-being and not serve as objects of investigation' (Breitbart, 2003: 162); collaborating in the research process to create a more accurate and authentic dialogue (Burgess, 2006: 430).

This is underpinned by the reconsideration of research as a vehicle for social change (Cahill, 2007a: 338); working with subject collaborators in a way that addresses their needs and interests. As such, FPAR can be described as, 'a conceptual and methodological framework that enables a critical understanding of women's multiple perspectives and works towards inclusion, participation, and action, while confronting the underlying assumptions researchers bring into

the research process'; seeking to build knowledge to engender change in women's lives (Reid, Tom and Frisby, 2006: 316). FPAR researchers look to engage collaboratively with participants in an effort to understand and enact solutions to problems of major importance to a community of women (ibid), in a manner that is culturally sensitive and empowering (Mason and Clemans, 2008: 67).

Aziz et al note that, 'typically, participatory action research involves creating spaces in which participants engage together in cycles of critical reflection and action. However, it is best understood not as a methodology or a set of techniques, but as an approach or orientation to inquiry' (Aziz, Shams and Khan, 2011: 306). Indeed, 'the evolution of feminist theory from the single-issue stance of seeing all women as oppressed to a more sophisticated and complicated position of assessing women in terms of social status, education, and power-wielding ability calls for research methods that fit the problems being addressed' (Mason and Clemans, 2008: 68). Moreover, it has been asserted that a fundamental principle of FPAR is that it begins with an interest in the problems of a group, a community or an organisation, and that the research should endeavour to enhance the relevance of research as a whole and connect research to larger social change efforts (Langan and Morton, 2009: 166).

The mixture of methods deployed through FPAR, and the emphasis both on collaboration with research participants and on a commitment to social change, means that the methodological approach to this study can be aligned with FPAR in its core principles. Stanley asserts that feminism is not merely a perspective or an epistemology, it, 'is also an ontology, or a way of being in the world' (1990: 14). As noted above, a key concern in FPAR literature and practice is that the knowledge produced is useful for participants and reflect their key concerns. The nature of research conducted during the period from September 2008 – December 2010 whilst at the WNC was indeed shaped by the priorities and specific issues of concern to the Northern Ireland women's movement. The purpose of meetings and events held in Belfast was to understand the particular Northern Ireland picture for women and the women's movement; events were developed and led by the WNC Northern Ireland Commissioner and Northern Ireland WNC partners, and material fed into the WNC's UK-wide work was thus fundamentally shaped by the agency and interests of members of the Northern Ireland movement themselves. The FPAR model advanced here is somewhat different to that seen in much FPAR scholarship; the production of knowledge was conducted primarily according to the needs and criteria of an organisation (the WNC). However, the partnership model of this process, in which knowledge was created and developed alongside the Northern Ireland women's movement within an organisational framework committed to feminist principles and goals, means that it closely aligns with FPAR.

Therefore, by centrally participating in a professional capacity in the activities described above, it can be said that this research process takes the 'lived experience as the starting point for investigation, values the knowledge produced through collaboration and in action, [and] pushes scholarship to be accountable to the communities most affected by it' (Cahill, 2007b: 268). Further, having worked alongside the Northern Ireland women's movement at the WNC and again through NAWO, I have certainly developed a strong awareness (as noted in FPAR literature) of the need to be accountable to the Northern Ireland women's movement as a community of women willing to share their knowledge and experiences with me; thereby remaining faithful to a core principle of PAR more generally, that, 'ultimately, participatory research is about respecting and understanding the people with and for whom researchers work...[realising] that local people are knowledgeable and that they,

together with researchers, can work toward analyses and solutions' (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995: 1674).

As a Policy Advisor at the WNC, I encountered or worked alongside women from the Northern Ireland women's movement on a range of occasions, such as at meetings in London where representatives from the Northern Ireland women's movement were present and made substantial contributions, as well as events in Belfast which were run by and for women's movement members and activists. I was present at such events in a professional capacity, whether to run meetings or as a representative of the WNC; therefore I was invested in the outcomes and not a distanced observer. For this reason, unique information and observations were gathered and have contributed to an analysis of bridging and linking social capital in the women's movement.

This period of working with women from the movement proved highly useful during subsequent periods of field research in Northern Ireland. As Hammersley and Atkinson note, when interviewing people with whom one already has a relationship through participant observation (or the means described above), rapport – or the foundation for rapport – may have been established and thereby facilitate the interviewing process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1994: 109). I anticipated and experienced this foundation of rapport when interviewing leaders in the women's movement with whom I had prior contact. Further, combining engaged research with interviews (in this instance, as part of an FPAR approach) can allow data from each being used to illuminate the other, with the former having a potential effect on how information from the latter is interpreted and vice versa (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1994: 102). I was conscious that what I 'heard' during interviews may have been affected by the range of observations made during occasions of engaged research.

In a discussion about an FPAR project, Reid et al caution that, 'there were also significant challenges and risks associated with acting. It is our view that both the PAR and FPAR literatures underestimate the risks associated with taking action to change one's life... participation in any action research endeavour may also carry risks for participants' (Reid et al, 2006: 326). Therefore, with a consideration of how the research could be useful to the women participants in the study comes a need to reflect on the process of research and impact of the 'knowledge' produced, to ensure that it could not work against their interests (Gillies and Alldred, 2002: 42). Through working (both for the WNC and for NAWO) alongside the Northern Ireland women's movement with a foundation of broadly shared feminist aims as part of a UK women's movement, the likelihood of creating risk or misunderstandings for research participants and myself as researcher were, it is hoped, significantly reduced. Moreover, an openness was sought with research participants about the research questions, the intentions and perspectives that delineate the study, and about the researcher's background and how this has shaped the choice of study.

There has also been a need to consider the interests of participants in light of the position of Northern Ireland as a post-conflict state, which could have had implications for interaction with individuals in the women's movement and come with a responsibility for discretion. For instance, whilst the risk of sanctions for cross-community work has lessened significantly since the time when a women's centre in a Protestant area of Belfast was attacked the day after the then President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, visited the centre on its opening; nevertheless a number of women's centres are located in some of the most marginalised and deprived areas of Northern Ireland, where the day-to-day reality for women working in these centres is markedly different to those in policy-oriented women's organisations situated more

centrally. This required a greater sensitivity to how information shared by these women was used. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge a degree of validity in the assertion that, 'the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater is the danger' (Stacey, 1988: 24). This 'danger' of research participants becoming inadvertently subject to misrepresentation, perhaps through an assumed confidentiality, was a matter to be kept in mind during the research process and mitigated in part by rigorous self-awareness and transparency (ibid: 26).

An FPAR methodology has therefore been adopted in part as a result of circumstance; working alongside the Northern Ireland women's movement at the WNC and then within a wider UK women's movement at NAWO allowed for a participatory approach in which the Northern Ireland movement could be engaged as collaborators and participants in the research process. It also facilitated the generation of and access to documents of relevance to the study, and opportunities for participant observation at meetings, Board meetings and events in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the research process. This has become a key means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents, and the method (from a feminist methodological position) is characterised as involving both the researcher and interviewee in a collaborative process (Heyl, 2007: 374).

Semi-structured interviews are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. Feminist scholars (notably Ann Oakley, 1981) have argued that this more conversational style is particularly salient when interviewing women, as traditional guidelines recommending distance between interviewer and interviewee reinforce unequal power dynamics. It has been argued that this method allows women to describe their experiences in their own terms, to developing more egalitarian relationships with interviewees, and to encouraging interviewees to introduce new research questions based on their own lived experiences (Taylor, 1998: 366). As interviews for this study were conducted with women identified with the feminist women's movement in Northern Ireland, it was judged that semi-structured interviews were the format with which they were most comfortable. Moreover, a core aim of this thesis has been to understand the internal processes, reflections and debates leading to strategic change and decision-making: the transition following the electoral failure of the NIWC and the process of seeking to develop bridging structures and linking ties. Interviews and participant observation were therefore chosen as effective means for this, by engaging movement leaders in discussion to explore and probe such instances and seeking evidence by observing interactions and processes in the movement.

### **c. FPAR and leadership agency**

Chapter 2 will outline the theoretical foundation for the study as a social capital feminist approach that takes leadership agency into account. It concludes that feminist scholarship has found social capital literature to be inadequate in its consideration of the kinds of social capital that develop in the women's movement or female-centric organising; applying a social capital lens to explore the women's movement, and framing the nature of its organisation and relationship with the State. However, a social capital analysis of the women's movement in Northern Ireland must take account of particular defining circumstances and characteristics, and adjust the theoretical and methodological frameworks accordingly; notably, the

importance of recognising the role of leadership and agency within the movement. The chapter will argue that an understanding of the 'activating' role of feminist leadership in the Northern Ireland women's movement in determining its strategic direction sheds light on transitional moments and tactical changes. Further, and crucially, it provides an important theoretical frame for exploring a movement that centres around a core leadership group of women with multiple representations across a range of women's organisations and who have a long-standing history of women's movement involvement.

As such, the methods adopted to study the post-Women's Coalition movement reflect this reality of a central core network of women, who have multiple leading roles across the movement in bridging and linking capacities and so can be identified as a leadership group; and are informed by an FPAR approach to uncovering and understanding social capital, which takes individual agency and leadership fully into account as will be outline in Chapter 2. A methodological approach that considers leadership agency is further underscored by my partial 'insider' positions both at the WNC and latterly at NAWO. The body of evidence made available through these professional roles has been particularly comprised of engagement with core leadership in the Northern Ireland women's movement, exactly by virtue of the movement's particular structure around designated organisational roles (NIWEP as the Europe and UN-focused movement representative, for instance). This very structure around designated roles and responsibilities, embodied in a key group of individuals, is a defining feature of the women's movement, particularly in relation to the development of linking ties, and my position within the UK women's movement has offered greater understanding of this leadership agency and its impact on the development of bridging and linking social capital.

However, my position alongside and within the women's movement has created certain constraints and ethical questions in the course of conducting an FPAR study. Whilst my position at both the WNC and NAWO has allowed the development of collaborative professional and research relationships with key feminist leaders in the Northern Ireland women's movement, it may be argued that these research collaborators do not represent the full spectrum of the women's movement in its entirety or diversity. Scholarship on leadership agency will be used to explain why engagement with a core group of leaders has been considered to be a legitimate determining course of study in this context, however it should be acknowledged that other leaders (feminist or otherwise) in or allied to the women's movement in Northern Ireland fell outside the purview of study. Moreover, whilst the depth and breadth of women's movement collaboration and participation has facilitated the production of insights and evidence beyond what I believe would have been possible without the FPAR model, nevertheless this was largely within the organisational parameters of my professional engagement as a representative of two different organisations, in addition to my position as a feminist researcher.

To a large extent, this determined the majority of the key relationships which have underpinned the study; that is, I was in a much better position to collaborate and engage with some women's movement leaders than others, because it is these very leaders who are active in developing the kinds of bridging and linking social capital which are the subject of this study and in which I was engaged through the WNC and NAWO. As a feminist researcher using an FPAR model, and as a representative of two organisations who work or worked in collaboration (as mediated through their leaders), this has also thrown up questions about the production of knowledge that is of use to the movement. As seen in the quote at the beginning of this FPAR discussion (b.), FPAR scholars are open in stating their subjectivities and wish to further the improvement of women's lives.

I have endeavoured to be conscious throughout of my greater insider status through close collaboration with a group of leaders in the women's movement, and the information to which I have been privy. Determining how best to use certain information and understanding the working of the movement, particularly at a time when intra-movement tensions are high and relationships with government officials and other women's movements in the UK, Europe and globally are of heightened importance, has required particular care and reflexivity. Similarly, my responsibility not to undermine my professional relationships with leaders and organisations in the Northern Ireland women's movement has also at times been a consideration. For instance, I have had to consider how or if to use knowledge, gleaned through professional positions, of intra-movement tensions, and what the ethical implications and impact for the movement would be of incorporating this kind of information. This has led to the occasional omission of comments which identify particular individuals or organisations from leaders during interviews and participant observation, notably when discussing tensions or conflict within the movement; whilst retaining the substance of the evidence.

Three trips to Northern Ireland were taken to conduct interviews in summer 2011, November 2012 and December 2013 (the full details are listed in the Appendix). These in-depth, semi-structured interviews probed the thesis of bridging and linking social capital, and sought to explore whether and how women's movement organisations develop and maximise bridging ties to engender collaboration, and further, to understand the role of agency amongst the core leadership; whether and how this leadership network is central both to strong bridging ties and possible linking ties, and how this influences the strategic direction and purported cohesive nature of the women's movement. Moreover, a group interview was conducted to discuss young women's feminist activism with members of the Belfast Feminist Network; and I was also invited to sit in on a NIWEP Board meeting.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from women's groups focused on female political representation (NIWEP and DemocraShe), women's social and economic advancement (WRDA), umbrella organisations (Women's Support Network, among others), statutory bodies, government officials, former NIWC members and academics. These interviews sought to understand the ways in which the women's movement 'spends' its bridging social capital; acting collectively and reaching compromise. As such, questions explored the nature and work of women's movement network alliances like the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group and addressed the issue of whether this operational organisation within the women's movement allows for links to be established with policy-makers. They explored how such women's movement structures are led; how decisions are made amongst the core representatives, how responsibilities are shared and how conflicts, if any, are resolved amongst leaders who may need to reconcile and balance the needs of the movement with those of their own specific organisations.

Specific lines of questioning were therefore directed to particular interviewees, in order to address certain research questions: for instance, individuals (notably Monica McWilliams, Margaret Ward, Avila Kilmurray, Ann Hope and Bronagh Hinds) who had been leading figures in the NIWC and its transition following electoral failure, and have continued to engage in the women's movement (or related fields), were questioned about the internal debates and processes undertaken to develop and implement strategic change following the disbanding of the Women's Coalition. Individuals associated with bridging structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group (such as Margaret Ward, Lynn Carvill and Bronagh Hinds) were asked about how these structures were developed, their internal processes and how leaders work through these

structures to establish policy expertise (and hence legitimacy in the eyes of government) and linking ties.

Almost all the interviewees were questioned about linking ties beyond the Northern Ireland level due to the breadth of women's movement engagement in UN processes in particular. However, interviews with leaders from NIWEP (Kate McCullough, Liz Law, Ann Marie Gray and Emma Patterson-Bennett) particularly sought to answer questions about the role of leadership agency in relation to UK, European and international engagement, and about the existence and extent of bridging links with the women's movements in the rest of Britain, and how these ties are mobilised to engage more fully with government. Furthermore, representatives of post-1998 equality bodies such as the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission (Liz Law and Monica McWilliams respectively) were interviewed to map influence in equality policy in Northern Ireland and understand such bodies' relationships with the women's movement. Extensive archival research has also been conducted, and data collected from documents and correspondence available from Northern Ireland women's groups and governmental bodies, as well as transcripts of their meetings and interaction with government and officials at other institutions.

This thesis is interested in key moments of strategic change in the movement, where emphasis was deliberately placed on leadership of a highly-networked movement. As such, focus has been placed on interviews with key players. A series of interviews were undertaken to address the research questions and thus were wide-ranging, particularly in the several cases where the interviewee was a long-standing and current member of the women's movement and had been involved with the Women's Coalition. Leaders from NIWEP were interviewed on a number of occasions: Kate McCullough and Liz Law were interviewed together in summer 2011. They both sit on the NIWEP Committee, and through NIWEP had been the leading Northern Ireland partners to the Women's National Commission. NIWEP's role is primarily to lead on international policy, notably on the UN and EU, and therefore discussion primarily addressed NIWEP's engagement at this level and their work to raise these issues at the domestic level. Questions were also asked about whether and how the movement acts as a collective, and how it fits into the wider UK women's movement.

Liz Law was interviewed again in summer 2011 in her capacity as a policy officer at the Equality Commission. This interview sought to understand the role of the Commission as part of the post-Peace Agreement equality architecture, its relationship with the Government and women's movement, and about the Commission's engagement at the European level. I also attended a NIWEP Committee meeting in summer 2011, held at the Northern Ireland European Commission Office. I gave a short introductory explanation for my research and observed the Committee's workings and discussion, which ranged from the recent European Women's Lobby (EWL) General Assembly, attended by Liz Law as an EWL Board member and UK women's movement representative to EWL, to discussion of the post-WNC UK women's movement and NIWEP's involvement with the newly constituted All Party Group (APG) on UNSCR 1325: Women, Peace and Security.

NIWEP is also the organisation that takes the lead in compiling the Northern Ireland women's movement's Shadow report to the CEDAW Committee. In November 2012, Ann Marie Gray from the NIWEP Committee and the University of Ulster was therefore interviewed to discuss the process of consulting with the women's movement and engaging with the Northern Ireland and UK governments to compile this report, and to talk more generally about the women's movement and social policy in Northern Ireland. Similarly, Emma Patterson-Bennett,

also on NIWEP's Committee, answered questions about NIWEP's role in establishing and acting as the Secretariat for the Northern Ireland Assembly's All Party Group on UNSCR 1325: Women, Peace & Security, including the wider engagement of the women's movement with the APG. Kate McCullough and Emma Patterson-Bennett were both interviewed separately for a second time in December 2013.

Two individuals from the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) were each interviewed, once in summer 2011 and again in November 2012: Women's Sector Lobbyist Lynn Carvill and Director Margaret Ward. A significant aspect of Lynn's role was forging links with politicians and political parties, therefore questions probed her work in this area and the nature of the relationship between politicians and the women's movement. The discussion also explored examples of bridging capital within the movement, particularly through Lynn's work in facilitating the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group. Whereas Lynn emphasised the building of trust and cooperation, the discussion with Margaret Ward pointed to antagonistic areas of the relationship between the women's movement and policy-makers, notably the prevalence of a gender neutral understanding of gender equality amongst policy-makers, and the at times strained relationship with civil servants. Questions were asked about the Government's engagement with the international gender equality agenda, and about the good relations language and the impact this has on the women's movement, particularly in relation to funding opportunities. Moreover, there was some discussion about Margaret's involvement with and perception of the NIWC.

Ann Hope and Bronagh Hinds were interviewed together in summer 2011. Ann Hope is a former Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Women's National Commission, and at the time of interview, served on the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission board. Bronagh Hinds was the Northern Ireland Commissioner for the WNC at the time of its abolition, and runs women's political engagement project DemocraShe. Both women were active members of the Women's Coalition and had been involved in women's rights activism and the civil rights campaign before the NIWC was established, therefore questions covered these topics at length. They talked about the current women's movement and how different groups work collaboratively, as well as tensions that exist. There was discussion about the role of sectarian identity in Northern Irish politics, and the impact this has on policy-making in general and equality policy in particular, as well as the nature of the Government's approach to addressing gender in policy-making. Moreover, questions were asked about the importance of the international arena for the women's movement. Jane Wilde was also closely involved with the Women's Coalition and when interviewed in summer 2011, questions were asked about how the NIWC operated, what drew her to become involved and the ending of the Coalition.

A number of further interviews were conducted in summer 2011. Patricia Haren was interviewed in her capacity as Director of the Women's Support Network, which acts as the policy-oriented umbrella organisation representing the women's centres in Northern Ireland. As such, she was questioned about how the WSN fits into the women's movement and the work undertaken to ensure that the voices of working-class women – who are the primary women's centre users and employees or volunteers – are a part of the policy discussion. Questions were asked about interaction with policy-makers and funding in particular, whether and how the women's movement operates in a complementary way and working with women at the local community level. Avila Kilmurray, Director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, was questioned about the role of the Community Foundation, its work on equality, whether and how it supports or collaborates with the women's movement, the



international links of community organisations in Northern Ireland and how the Foundation uses social capital analysis as a policy tool. Moreover, she talked about her involvement in the Women's Coalition and its legacy. At the time of interviewing, Eileen Sung was Head of Gender and Sexual Orientation Equality at OFMDFM, and was questioned about her perceptions of the women's movement, the nature of her interaction and collaboration with the movement, the processes of gender equality policy in government and the impact of the international gender equality agenda.

Four members of the Belfast Feminist Network were interviewed together in summer 2011. The Network was established in 2010; there is a strong student membership due to its links with the Queens' University Feminist Society, and it has approximately 500 members through its online community presence. It is therefore a different type of group to the more established and long-standing women's grassroots or policy groups. They were interviewed to explore whether and how the Network fits into the overall networked structure of the women's movement, the nature of their activism, and to explore how younger women are engaging with feminism in Northern Ireland. The discussion covered their engagement with politicians and women's groups, and how they organise and decide on projects.

#### **d. Conclusion**

To conclude, the methodological framework of this study may be characterised as an FPAR approach, which takes individual agency and leadership fully into account to more accurately uncover and understand bridging and linking social capital in the Northern Ireland women's movement. This methodological section has sought to make the case both for the adoption of an approach that is informed by a commitment to collaboration, feminist principles and the production of knowledge that is of use to the research participants, in line with FPAR more broadly; and further, a perspective informed by a position within the UK women's movement itself, arguing that this can grant greater insights, levels of rapport and scholarly rigour. This study does not claim to encompass the entire range of feminist activity in Northern Ireland; its primary interest is the nature and extent of bridging and linking social capital to enable the women's movement to engage with and influence policy-makers at different levels of governance to promote greater equality for women in Northern Ireland.

A methodology was therefore developed which would most effectively address the research questions. To acquire insights into debates, decisions and processes for effecting movement-wide changes (which are a focus of the research questions), interviews with leaders were used as a method which can reveal individual agency and recall details and a picture of internal relationships that may not be available through other means. Similarly, participant observation allows for a greater level of understanding to be obtained by the researcher, by placing her closer to the subject of research. Observation, even participation, in meetings, events and other fora establish opportunities for insights to be made about women's movement decision-making, relationships between leaders and strategies for pursuing and maintaining linking ties. These methods were supplemented by extensive documentary analysis.

A reflexive, collaborative approach founded upon semi-structured interviews with movement leaders, participant observation and documentary analysis facilitated this study's focus both on process rather than outcomes and leadership agency as outlined in the research questions, enabling the reconstruction of internal processes within the women's movement in

order to account for both strategic and tactical changes and developments at key moments following the end of the Women's Coalition. As explored in section 2.a., the applied feminist methodology of this thesis engendered a commitment to 'listen closely' and recognise the 'special agency' of the research participants, facilitated by an approach which drew upon FPAR methods based upon my location working within the UK women's movement, and combined with semi-structured interviews founded upon a degree of rapport.

Moreover, 2.b. referred to the risk posed by an assumed 'mutuality' in the relationship between researcher and researched that can result in the potential for misrepresentation. This risk was mitigated by transparency with research participants both in interviews and during events as part of the FPAR approach, alongside vigilant self-reflection and 'conscious reflexivity'. However, it should also be stressed that my commitment to 'listen closely' and respect the special agency and expertise of the leaders that I interviewed and observed also required a critical analysis of narrative, particularly during interviews. For instance, the remarkable story of the establishment and successes of the Women's Coalition has been recounted many times; exploring the research question of this thesis in relation to the NIWC required, at times, asking questions of interviewees which sought to divert discussion away from familiar narratives about the NIWC to less-examined, transitional moments. This yielded new insights in some cases during the interview process, and in others it re-affirmed a particular, central narrative; nevertheless, revealing that what may appear to be a shared narrative in the 'telling' of a collective endeavour can be problematised to reveal new insights. The following chapter will set out the theoretical foundations for answering the research questions, arguing that a feminist social capital approach which recognises leadership agency can uncover insights into women's movement mobilisation, strategic change and renewal, and the multiple levels at which it engages in order to advance shared goals.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Approaches and Debates

#### 1. Introduction – women’s activism in a divided society

The dynamics of gender paradigms and gendered discourse in both the recent history of Northern Ireland, and in the current political environment, is a crucial and yet often overlooked facet of studies of a region framed in masculinised terms. The Troubles embedded a narrative centred on a rhetoric of security and the constitutional question. This served to exclude the interests and priorities articulated by women, which were constructed in gendered terms as private and ‘feminine’, and thus not of pressing political and economic precedence (Wilford, 1996: 47 and Galligan, Ward and Wilford, 1999: 112). The result of this political marginalisation was the development of a notably vibrant women’s movement, which developed and coalesced in this context around a shared sense of frustration at their exclusion (both the discursive exclusion of so-called ‘women’s issues’ and women’s marginalisation in political structures).

This study proceeds from the understanding, using the case study of Northern Ireland and drawing on existing academic scholarship, that in this instance women during and immediately after the conflict forged productive and creative ties *as women* beyond the Protestant-Catholic axis, through a shared understanding of women’s needs and interests. The withdrawal of the Government from holistic social welfare and the local community level in favour of a security doctrine determined by a narrow definition of democracy (see Roulston, 1997; McWilliams, 1995; Hinds, 1999 and Kilmurray, 1987), left a gap in community welfare that women came to fill. In a situation which could see violent incursions in their homes and local communities, women in Northern Ireland on one side of the religious divide sought common ground with women on the other, who were equally subject to a society in which women’s needs and interests were subsumed into a system where ethnic discord worked to exclude women.

As such, their cross-community work served to establish productive ties between women across the divide – of fundamental importance to the peace-building process - and crucially, created a collective political consciousness which saw women as agents of change, based on shared experiences. Thus, it was a conflict and post-conflict context which served as the catalyst for the creation of productive ties and practical alliances between Protestant and Catholic women (see Hinds, 1999: 110-111 and Hope, 2006: 4), and this is the foundation for pursuing the research questions of this study. Moreover, as Mettler argues: ‘It is time to “bring the state back in” to the study of civic life’ (in Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005: 347), with social movement studies having yet to develop adequate accounts of institutionalisation (Andrew, 2010: 609). This is particularly true in light of the trend for ‘women’s policy machinery’ to be institutionalised in the policy structure, with the recognition that the preservation of equity agendas requires not only routinised accountability mechanisms within government but also strong pressure from outside (Sawer, 1996: iii). As Chappell argues, ‘the relationship between feminists and political institutions is both interactive and dynamic’ (Chappell, 2000: 268-9). The extent to which the women’s movement in Northern Ireland engages with political institutions

both domestically and at the international level will therefore be a critical concern of this study.

## **2. Feminist Theory**

In order to analyse the women's movement's efforts to influence and gender policy-making, this study aligns with a body of feminist scholarship which has extensively problematised, 'the distortions in mainstream behavioural political science arising from an epistemology that's separated facts from values and privileged so-called value-free factual accounts' (Lovenduski, 1998: 334). This has particular salience for a study of women in Northern Ireland, in which women's marginalisation from formal politics and undervaluing of their role in civil society remained little questioned during the Troubles with the 'distortions' of sectarianism and conflict. Therefore, the ways in which traditional political scholarship and the formal political realm has both ignored women's exclusion from what was deemed 'political' on the one hand, and failed to frame what women have traditionally done as political, on the other, can be seen in real terms in relation to women in Northern Ireland.

Lovenduski notes that families, communities, voluntary groups and other denoted 'private sphere' collective activities all went largely unresearched as constitutive of political life (Lovenduski, 1998: 334) – the spheres from which the mobilisation of women in Northern Ireland originated. Feminist scholarship that draws attention to an implicit public/private split, which has confined women to the private realm and associated activities within this arena as apolitical by definition, can therefore contribute much to reframing the collective activities and forms of activism undertaken by women's groups in Northern Ireland. The association of women with the private sphere not only leads to their practical exclusion from political life, but also constructs conceptions of politics, rationality and justice in such a way that faculties associated with femininity are excluded, by definition, from these realms. That is, the meanings of sexual difference are inscribed in the way rationality and autonomy tend to be constructed (Longo, 2001: 271).

As Sarah Childs has argued, feminist political science – as the critique of political theory's traditional exclusion of women as political actors, and thus efforts to make them visible in the discipline (Carroll and Zerilli, 1993: 55-56) – has critiqued the tendency within the mainstream's conceptualisation of politics to exclude or discount forms of participation that fall outside the boundaries of a narrow definition of 'politics' (Childs, 2008: 3). By re-conceptualising what it is to 'be political' or 'do politics', feminist scholars have opened up a vibrant new field of study into activity outside the formal sphere of masculinised high politics, arguing that women's collective action in civil society belies claims about women's apolitical nature. Waylen notes that the 'competitive elitist view' defines politics narrowly as including only the upper institutional echelons of the public sphere. By this definition, women's absence in great numbers from the political elite means that they do not appear to be politically active. The significance of the sorts of wider political activities in which women are most likely to be engaged, such as social movements, is therefore downplayed (Waylen, 1994: 333). Indeed, this blindness to the political nature of community action and honouring of formalised politics ignores the politically productive nature of this arena. It serves both to strengthen deprived communities and can boost individual and collective self-confidence, as individuals and groups come together to see themselves as political actors and effective citizens. This is especially true for women for whom involvement in voluntary organisations can be more personally fruitful

than formal political engagement, which is often experienced as more alienating than empowering (Lister, 1997:33).

Alongside the unpacking of gendered spheres has been a focus on gender itself and the distinction drawn between sex and gender; a distinction which precipitated a major re-examination of what is considered to be 'political' and who are considered to be political actors. Duerst-Lahti and Kelly assert that gender should be understood as a normative category and attribute, with gender relations as relations of domination and a feature of power in which particular kinds of masculinity are dominant and privileged (in Lovenduski, 1998: 342). The application of a gender lens to the study of political systems precipitated the unpicking of the hitherto uni-dimensional conception of what it is to be political, revealing the deeply embedded sense in which the political actor is conceived as male. Traditional western political science has constructed the model of a Universal Citizen; allegedly an ungendered actor, but as feminists have argued, in reality a white, heterosexual male (Tremblay, 2000: 340). By showing democratic systems to be fundamentally gendered power arrangements that privilege the male citizen, such critiques problematise political representation and highlight those who go unrepresented by this masculinised status quo. However, calls for the reworking of a male-gendered system to more accurately represent the needs and interests of women have been met with some hesitation by those, influenced by post-structuralism's dissolution of fixed categories and emphasis on multiple-identities (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005: 31), who question whether there is a singular category of 'woman.'

An effective elaboration of this issue is provided by Ann Phillips, who argues that there is no empirical or theoretical plausibility to the notion that women share experiences, that shared experiences translate into shared beliefs and goals, or that they will organise into a group with goals to be represented (Phillips, 1995). As Spelman argues, 'the notion of the generic "woman" functions in feminist thought... [to obscure] the heterogeneity of women and cuts off examination of the significance of such heterogeneity for feminist theory and political activity' (in Yuval-Davis, 1997: 25). Dietz presents a stark picture of the lack of conceptual unity in feminist scholarship around the category of woman: there is, 'no agreement in feminist theory about the meaning and status of the concept "women" or "gender identity," nor even consensus about how to appropriate gender as a useful category of analysis.' Indeed, under the standard rubric of feminist theory is a, 'multifaceted, discursively contentious field of inquiry that does not promise to resolve itself into any programmatic consensus or converge onto any shared conceptual ground' (Dietz, 2003: 401). Spelman's and others' objections to what Dietz labels 'social difference feminism' (ibid) is located in their belief that this failure to problematise such terms expresses a theoretical tendency to appropriate the concept of 'women' as an unproblematic universal, leading to charges of essentialism (Lugones and Spelman, 1983). This presupposes the lives of white, middle-class, heterosexual women as paradigmatic for the situation of all women. By contrast, diversity feminism emphasises differences, pluralities, heterogeneity, and multiplicity in the theorising of women, thereby rejecting the notion of a unitary group or singular gendered category (Dietz, 2003).

However, this critiquing within feminist theory of the notion of a subject presents a fundamental problem for feminism, as a historically constituted, local and global, social and political movement with an emancipatory purpose and a normative content (Dietz, 2003: 402). As Young states, 'feminist politics evaporates...without some conception of women as a social collective' (Young, 1997: 18). The concern of feminist political scientists to problematise the academic and practical exclusion of women from politics requires that the category of 'woman'

have some determinate meaning. Phillips offers a useful caveat, arguing that women do have particular concerns derived from gendered experiences. This is not to deny women's heterogeneity or the multiplicity of their identities informed by more than solely gender. Rather, it acknowledges an experience broadly shared by women because of their gender (Phillips, 1995). Moreover, Yuval-Davis presents a framework which, on the one hand, recognises that differences are important, but on the other, that notions of difference should encompass, rather than replace, notions of equality (Yuval-Davis, 1999).

Yuval-Davis takes the notion of the feminist 'epistemological community', which shares common value systems and can exist across difference, to posit transversal politics 'as a name for what so many of us are doing' (ibid). Transversality expresses an approach in which similar, compatible values can cut across differences in positionings and identity; emphasis is placed upon dialogue and coalition politics, recognising the differential power positions among participants in the dialogue, but nevertheless encompassing these differences with equal respect and recognition of each participant. The elaboration of transversal politics can therefore be seen as an effort by feminist scholars to theorise the normative expression of feminism, in which women's groups working across issues, and differentiated groups of women, form coalitions along shared goals and values. As will be argued, the Northern Ireland women's movement offers a cogent example of this phenomenon.

Therefore, whilst feminist scholars are wary of asserting potentially reductionist arguments which posit an undifferentiated and universal 'woman', discussions by Phillips and others have outlined a framework for discussing women's interests and representation *as women*. As Ruth Lister argues, 'the fact that the category "woman" is not unitary does not render it meaningless' (Lister 1997: 39). By drawing attention to the highly gendered political actor and masculinised system, such scholars have questioned the nature and extent of the political representation which such a system has produced. As Tremblay and Pelletier argue, even if men are more feminist than certain women, the former cannot embody the latter through the mechanisms of power, cannot express their experiences as second-class citizens, and cannot contribute to the legitimacy of a political system overtly monopolised by one gender at the expense of the other (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2000: 398).

The 'gendering' of political science, therefore, has sought to signify and validate women as political agents, both by widening the definition of the political to encompass activities outside the formalised public sphere, and by problematising the endurance of male dominance in formal arenas of political power. Feminist theory is therefore a useful framework to inform this study and help to answer the research questions. By conceptualising politics and political activity to encompass activities that are situated beyond the level of formal, elected politics, feminist scholars have opened women's movement activism and women's political representation to political science analysis. Feminist theory problematises identity and the notion of 'women's interests', working to reconcile a resistance to 'women' as a homogenising term with an underlying belief in a level of shared experience as women. This process of reconciliation has been observed in the Northern Ireland women's movement in practical terms, therefore feminist theory is central to understanding the ways in which the women's movement works to negotiate shared positions and act collectively.

### **a. Women's mobilisation and conflict/post-conflict**

Feminist theory's work of revealing gendered structures of masculinity and femininity, and of understanding women as subjects in their own right, has been taken up in conflict and post-conflict studies. This theoretical context is important to a discussion of the women's movement in Northern Ireland, as scholars have explored the growth of locally-based women's groups during the Troubles, in the context of government's focus on the constitutional question to the neglect of social policy; leading to a process of collaboration amongst women's groups across the sectarian divide in the years before and after the Peace Agreement. The emergence of the Women's Coalition demonstrates that the Peace Process opened up a new political space in which previously marginalised actors like women could establish and access channels of influence in the political sphere. The discussion below will explore and draw upon a rich body of scholarship discussing gender and conflict/post-conflict, which seeks to problematise simplistic characterisations of women as either peace-makers or victims, thereby obscuring the complexity of women's experiences in conflict and the path to peace (among others, Afshar and Eade, 2004; Sharoni, 2001; Hossain, 2012).

The narrative of women and conflict either asserts women's victimhood, or emphasises their resourcefulness in maintaining familial stability and 'natural' identification with peace. Such simplistic dualisms obscure the nature of conflict in both empowering and disempowering women, and positioning them as both victims and agents of change (Afshar and Eade, 2004: x). As Afshar notes, 'the views and experiences of such women are too complex to be included in documents that simply divide up territories and allocate material resources' (ibid: 2). However, it is exactly this focus on documents and formalised political processes which has characterised conflict and post-conflict studies. Within such narratives, women are rhetorically separate from the 'business' of conflict; whether as participants in violent confrontation or as proponents of peace. The designation of women as the generalised 'victim' hides the reality that women rarely have a choice about whether they are indeed victims or participants; constrained as they are by ethnic, religious or regional identities (Afshar in ibid: 3).

This denial of women's agency is far-reaching and framed as it is within a tradition of masculinised scholarship that focuses on formalised politics, further obscures women's actions within and beyond conflict. Thus, women's agency as combatants in conflict and the many ways in which women creatively sustain their local communities can be obscured. This work may not be overtly or self-declared 'peace-building'; nevertheless, by working at the grassroots to fill the gap left by the State, women can act as agents of peace, and as a result become political actors. As Chapter 3 will outline, whilst there were significant moments of organised and self-declared peace-work by groups of women in Northern Ireland – notably the Peace People who received global recognition – it was at the level of the proliferation of women's groups for social change, largely working at the grassroots and acting as vital local infrastructure organisations plugging welfare gaps irrespective of sectarian divides, that women's contribution to sustainable peace lay.

Feminist scholarship is therefore of vital importance to understanding the multiplicity of women's actions in and responses to post/conflict, and the ways in which both states in post-conflict and studies of these conditions can be inherently masculinised and so obscure women's agency. Feminist scholars, by problematising the public/private divide, have opened up a field of research into the range of women's activities within a highly masculinised context of conflict and post-conflict (for instance, Cockburn, 1998; Strickland and Duvvury, 2003;

Manchanda, 2001 and Afshar and Eade, 2004). Moreover, it is also acknowledged that women's collective initiatives under such circumstances contribute significantly to the establishment, embedding and maintenance of peace, and as such should be supported and encouraged. Underlying such views is the growing awareness that sustainable peace requires a more permanent transformation of social norms relating to violence, gender, and power, and they call for transformative approaches to achieve gender equality premised on more gender-equitable relationships (Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2004: 79).

The political and social implications of conflict for women can serve to entrench prevailing systems of patriarchy, excluding women from decision-making positions and relegating their needs and interests to a larger discourse of maintaining 'security', defined in militaristic and political power terms. Enloe (1983) has argued that it is often the case that women are held up as symbolic bearers of caste or national purity, thereby circumscribing their behaviour and excluding them from decision-making and combat in an effort to retain their, and the nation's or ethnic group's, purity. This conceptual and practical exclusion from active citizenship, both during conflict and in the establishment and maintenance of peace, can in reality be a creative space for women. Whilst conflict often results in gender disparities in women's access to essential services and resources, the gap left by the State in terms of welfare provision is frequently filled by women acting at the local level to provide for their communities and '[hold] together the social threads of society' (Marie Abbott, Northern Ireland Women's Coalition at Council of Europe, 2001). However, the many ways in which women foster peaceful relations are often overlooked because they take unconventional forms, occur outside formal peace processes, or are considered extensions of women's existing gender roles (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003: 1). Chapter 3 will review literature regarding the Northern Ireland government's retreat from social care provision, and its relation to the emergence of a sphere of women's groups to provide sites of civil participation outside of institutional arrangements.

Whilst the exclusion of women from high-level peace processes is a result of their frequent exclusion from positions of political decision-making in general, it is also due to the structure of international law and diplomacy with its emphasis on the abstract entity of the State. The effect of such structures can give legitimacy and increased power to militia leaders who have no accountability to the community (Byrne, 1996: 37). This pattern of peace negotiations is predicated upon viewing war as a structured activity in which male violence, as the sanctioned tool of waging war, can be moralised and accounted for. However, within this ideological context orienting peace negotiations, neither women's sometime status as combatants, nor their grassroots welfare and reconstruction efforts, are accommodated. This is founded on a pattern of formal peace-building processes which are focused on short-term measures administered by organisations which are themselves patriarchal, hierarchical and anchored in the 'old boy network' (Afshar in Afshar and Eade 2004: 5).

Policy-makers have made efforts to establish 'gender-aware' policy practice in both State-level and international conflict resolution and peace-building work, evident in the passing of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 which officially endorses the inclusion of civil society groups, notably women, in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements (Abbott, Council of Europe, 2001: 15). It is a, 'watershed political framework that makes women – and a gender perspective – relevant to negotiating peace agreements...and reconstructing war-torn societies. It makes the pursuit of gender equality



relevant to every single Council action, ranging from mine clearance to elections to security sector reform' (UNIFEM, 2002).

Women's engagement with conflict has been shown to frequently comprise advocacy for the establishment of peace institutions and centres to promote non-violence and women's rights. This does not mean that women are by nature more peace-loving, but rather that their socialisation enhances a more dialogic frame for addressing human experiences (Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, Council of Europe, 2001: 26). However, the narrative of war and embedded gender differentiation endures when peace is being negotiated. As such, collective activities at the local level among and between stratified communities are not recognised for their significant contribution to the political programme of peace-building, undermining the legitimacy of any peace process or subsequent political arrangement which has excluded the wide social base that women's groups represent and failing to account for women's differential experiences during war. As Sørensen argues, the exclusion of women in most cases from formal peace negotiations leads them to be implicitly identified as male domains, which means that they also employ discourses and practices that are closer to men's reality than to women's (Sørensen, 1998: iv). Therefore, 'conflict may simply provide a stage on which existing conceptions of gender are played out and refined, resulting in women's subordination becoming sharper, if seemingly offset by new advantages' (El-Bushra and Piza-Lopez, 1994: 190).

Women's lack of access to formal political platforms means that they often draw credibility and strength from a wider social base and promote their agenda at the grassroots level (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003: 7). As a result, women's contributions tend to be undervalued and not readily incorporated or sought by many practitioners of peace-building. However, in most conflicts, the traditional division of civilian space – private as women's space and public as men's space – collapses. This collapsed gendered differentiation allows women to develop community-level initiatives for peace across ethnic and national identities; it is through these spaces that women can play a significant role in building a new culture of peace at the local level by organising peace education and community-based reconciliation and social reconstruction activities (Sørensen, 1998: iv). Northern Ireland provides an interesting case of this foundation of community support for peace, fundamentally underpinned by women participating and leading community reconciliation and regeneration work at the local level.

However, as feminist scholars have argued (see El Jack, 2003, Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2004: 71, Manchanda, 2001: 28), and what characterises the feminist perspective around gender and conflict resolution, is the critical recognition that for many, particularly women, peace does not simply mean the end of the armed conflict, but a time to address the structural power imbalances that caused the conflict in the first instance. As Greenberg and Zuckerman (2003: 23) note, along with physical destruction, conflict destroys trust throughout society. They argue that shifting focus to people at the grassroots calls for a pragmatic, transformative agenda. In situations of conflict in which violence and social breakdown are experienced at the local level, the work of women's groups in communities can make a vital contribution to restoring bonds of trust and a common interest in peace based on shared goals. Yet further, the gendered nature of conflicts, in which women's interests are devalued and subsumed into a masculinist security narrative, means that women across cultural and ethnic divides find themselves working together by necessity, and develop a shared consciousness as women. This creates an environment in which ties amongst women, developed through work

to sustain social and welfare provision, can grow and act as a powerful agent for creating and sustaining peace.

In their work to problematise traditional security studies' narratives, feminist scholars have also sought to assert women's agency in conflict: '[h]ighlighting the common difficulties that women face as a group can easily degenerate into seeing them as innocent victims and prevents an appreciation of the great variety of roles women actually embrace' (Pankhurst, 2004: 32). It has been argued that rather than serving as an inevitable constraint on women's advancement and agency, conflict can serve as a springboard for emancipation and mobilisation as a fluidity in social ordering is introduced by, among other factors, women's involvement in grassroots activism (Sharoni, 2001: 87). Hossain argues that whilst, 'women's agency is shaped and constrained by belligerence and fear and by unlawful and sanctioned abuses of their rights, women (people) also become agents through such experiences.' She asserts that the abrogation of rights triggers empowering forms of mobilisation, around which women's political agency and organisation is built; which in turn, serves as an important political apprenticeship for women's movements emerging within conflict states (Hossain, 2012: 3). She notes that women's security issues have often been politicised around the idea of shared or universal harm, which enables women's movements to present a united front, and gain strength from their collective power (ibid: 28).

This is supported by scholars on the basis of particular examples of mobilisation within conflict. In reference to the Palestinian women's movement, Holt notes that, 'women experienced a degree of empowerment through their involvement in the intifada' (2004: 124), and Berkovitch and Moghadam explain that, 'their activism all through the Intifada helped them realize that once they began to focus on women's rights, a separate women's movement was needed' (1999: 280). Korac argues that women's groups in the former Yugoslavia were able to work across ethnic lines, recognising, 'the centrality of maintaining old and developing new connections across ethnic lines and boundaries of the new ethnicised states' and thereby demonstrating that, 'women of different ethnic backgrounds, with diverse experiences of victimisation, could establish and maintain relationships of mutual respect' (Korac, 2008: 114). Feminist theorists of conflict have therefore shown that the application of feminist theory to conflict can help to explain women's mobilisation and the emergence of women's movements; not least, the empowering development of a collective identity as women across ethnic and other divides. Chapter 3 will develop this theoretical foundation with a review of literature from scholars of Northern Ireland, who have charted this process in the development of an identifiable women's movement during the Troubles.

### **3. Social Capital theory**

As argued above, the elite-focused nature of security studies can obscure the wealth of productive activity occurring at the local level, within and between communities which are directly affected by conflict and forced to manage the fall-out from a state that has withdrawn from social provision. The theory of social capital is a useful tool with which to uncover and explore the ways in which people at local community level form productive bonds to help foster a stable social and political order in a conflict situation. Social capital has also been utilised by policy-makers to promote reconciliation. It has been adopted by the Northern Ireland government as part of the community relations agenda, and as will be shown in later chapters, has subsequently featured strongly in the language used in the voluntary sector and

statutory agencies in Northern Ireland. This section will explore scholarship that outlines and critiques social capital, and discuss how it has been adopted by the Government, as a foundation for elaborating how social capital theory shapes and can help to approach the research questions.

It will be argued that a feminist take on social capital can say something new about the women's movement in Northern Ireland, by acknowledging the difficulties that women face when moving from the social and voluntary sphere to the political sphere, and highlighting the considerable gap between being able to mobilise at the social level and accessing policy-making and governing institutions. This links to the wider discussion about social movements and institutionalisation, with social movement scholars tending to view it in terms of its (negative) effect on the capacity of the movement to sustain 'extra-institutional challenges', representing co-option and marginalisation (Epstein, 2001; Bagguley, 2002 and McAdam, Sampson, Weffer and MacIndoe, 2005). As Andrew has argued, such definitions neglect the more complex and less visible processes through which movement goals and values are partially adopted and then reconfigured by other institutions, and the kind of partial success that many movements experience: 'it is difficult to imagine movements succeeding without the adoption of the movement's principles and discourses by powerful institutions' (Andrew, 2010: 612).

The assertion that institutionalisation is anathema to social movements fails to acknowledge the ways in which activists have tried to embed their values in existing institutions, create new institutions, and take the opportunities presented by institutional change (Andrew, 2010: 615). Sawyer argues that institutionalisation has always formed part of the women's movement operation, meaning the creation of women-centred institutions within existing governmental or civil society institutions, institution-building outside existing institutions like women's centres or advocacy groups, and the establishment of new norms of behaviour and discursive frameworks as seen in the framing of policy documents from a feminist perspective (Sawyer, 2010: 603). As Andrew notes, however, institutionalisation does not represent opportunities alone, as less publicly visible evidence of an oppositional, autonomous women's movement leaves the State potentially less compelled to respond to challenges (Andrew, 2008: 29). Nevertheless, the projects and agendas of the women's movement, 'continue in forms ever more closely entwined with formal institutions and accepted ways of doing things' (Andrew, 2010: 610). The nature and extent of the Northern Ireland women's movement's linking ties with governmental institutions is therefore critical to a broader understanding of the ways in which the women's movement seeks to influence policy and challenge the existing social order.

However, prevailing assumptions about peace work based on gendered distinctions has meant that state-led work within a social capital framework appears to risk continuing the marginalisation of women. Social capital recognises the importance of networks of trust and reciprocity within and across social groups at different societal levels. In an international policy arena in which the role of gender has been inadequately conceptualised, due to a continuing emphasis on power-brokering between formal political actors and military leaders, social capital is a tool with which to acknowledge the importance of activities that contribute to restoring civic life and establishing peaceful relations across ethnic divides. That this work is often done by women means that their involvement in conflict transition and post-conflict stability can be conceptualised with a social capital framework, despite women being largely excluded from the political arena of formal peace processes. It is therefore highly pertinent to

the study of the Northern Irish women's movement, whose exclusion from formalised political processes led to the development of productive ties and a political consciousness, despite ethnic divisions.

It is the utility of social capital in offering a logic of post-conflict development to policy-makers that has caused it to accrue significant political mileage amongst governments seeking to embed peace and security through social and economic development. For societies emerging from conflict, in which governance structures may have broken down or failed to incorporate and represent all constituent groups, social capital - as resources embedded in social networks that are accessed or mobilised through ties in the networks - represents an asset that can be developed as a productive force. The encompassing nature of social capital has caused the theory to inform the study of families, education, public health, community life, democracy and governance, economic development, and general problems of collective action (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 17). Further, applying social capital theory to a feminist study of post-conflict states in general, and to Northern Ireland in particular, allows for an understanding of particular ways in which women act collectively and contribute in significant ways to the transition to and maintenance of peace.

Classical analyses of capital as either financial, physical or comprising other tangible assets, neglect the value - even in narrow economic terms - that lies in social networks and shared values that facilitate cooperation between actors (Aldridge, Halpern and Fitzpatrick, 2002: 12). Social capital is relational rather than the property of any one individual, and is produced by societal investments of time and effort, but in a less direct fashion than is human or economic capital. Rather, social capital is the result of historical, cultural and social factors which give rise to norms, values and social relations that bring people together in networks or associations that result in collective action (OECD, 2001). As such, it is not simply the existence of networks that facilitates the development of social capital, but is further the norms and values that develop as a result of association within such networks. It is a property of social structure, as opposed to an attitude such as social trust.

Coleman defined social capital as, 'a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspects of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors within the structure' (Coleman, 1988). For Coleman, this form of capital exists in the relations among people and develops as a productive force where trust exists and action is taken in the interests of the collectivity; it is a 'norm', which develops amongst the group and encourages the development of social movements populated by mutually rewarding members. Bourdieu saw social capital as the investment of the members in the dominant class (as a group or network) engaging in mutual recognition and acknowledgement so as to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group's dominant position. Membership in the group is based on a clear demarcation (such as that of nobility, title, family) excluding outsiders (Lin, 1999: 34). In this sense, rather than being a productive force, social capital is a means of amassing power and concentrating it in the hands of the already powerful.

Robert Putnam has produced a body of influential work on social capital. His core claim is that typical face-to-face deliberative activities and horizontal collaboration within community and voluntary organisations (which are separate from the political sphere), such as sports clubs, unions and charitable organisations, promote interpersonal trust. This trust builds up the bonds of social life, generating both individual rewards such as support networks and professional prospects, and community goods by enabling people to work together on community issues. For Putnam, interactions among people in these groups and organisations

create horizontal networks of civic engagement that help participants to act collectively in a way that contributes positively to community productivity and well-being (OECD, 2001). Social capital is, 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 1995). Thus, social capital is seen to be productive if and when it facilitates the achievement of particular common ends and encourages cooperative behaviour. This has positive implications for democracy, by embedding economic and political negotiation in networks of social interaction and thereby engaging citizens in democratic systems and reducing political opportunism amongst elected representatives. Thus, the participation by individuals in voluntary associations becomes a 'school in democracy' and provides experiences that become assets when political action is taken outside of the organisational environment (Teorell, 2003).

Central to Putnam's thesis is a notion of community that is imbued with highly positive connotations, conveying an image of helpful, friendly interactions between individuals based upon personal knowledge and face-to-face contact (Leonard, 2004: 929). For Putnam, the building of social capital is a positive force both within the community, and more widely for democracy itself. The underlying implication is a homogenised conception of the community, which neglects inherent inequalities among and between individuals. At the level of bonding social capital, Putnam sees the benefits of individuals' associational involvement as instilling norms and values like collaboration and shared responsibilities. However, as Lin argues, 'equating dense or closed networks with better or greater amount of social capital is conceptually flawed. What is needed is to specify conditions under which network features such as density or openness lead to the capturing of certain resources that generate certain kinds of returns' (Lin, 2005: 4).

Critics of Putnam's work point to the danger that bonding groups can have dysfunctional consequences for society by exacerbating existing social inequalities, especially in pluralist societies fractured by ethnic divisions and conflict (Norris and Inglehart, 2003: 5). In such societies, in which the various communities have differentiated access to resources and power, the existence of bonding social capital within each group may have varying levels of utility, whilst the consequence of ethnic discord may be that bridging links are virtually non-existent. In the case of the former, a disadvantaged or minority community with little access to political or economic power may be closely bonded in order to mitigate this exclusion, yet without bridging links to other communities or linking capital to policy-making structures, this bonding capital may simply reinforce their secondary status and embed societal cleavages.

Social capital can therefore reinforce existing power structures and exclude those placed outside the community (O'Neill and Gidengil, 2006: 36). As such, there has been little recognition in some elaborations of the theory that the bonds of trust and a shared social life, which are the consequences of the accrual of social capital, are not evenly and equally distributed. Social capital is lodged in social relationships, hence its utility is circumscribed according to the boundaries of those relationships (ibid: 162). Social capital creates resources for some people that are unavailable to others; social relationships reflect the inequality or society, as they tend to operate on principles of homophily (Sapiro, 2006: 162). Social and demographic inequalities, which are rooted in educational qualifications, socioeconomic status, gender, age and other individually-held societal characteristics, lead to inequalities in other civic assets. Possession of these assets makes some better placed to take advantage of chances to participate (Norris and Inglehart, 2003: 6).

A key component of Putnam's argument, and a politically appealing claim for policy-makers, is that social capital can be converted into political engagement. Putnam disrupted traditional narratives about citizenship by demonstrating that participation in sports clubs and other socially-based associational activities is important to the creation of a 'civic community' (Lowndes, 2004: 56). This civic community spirit, Putnam argues, can be converted into political engagement and is therefore fundamental to the creation and health of a flourishing democratic system, with citizens who both engage in political activities through greater political knowledge, and who hold their elected representatives to account (Norris and Inglehart, 2003: 3). Social capital theorists argue that while established forms of political participation like party membership have declined, new forms such as 'town-hall'-style forums, grassroots activism and more broad-based social movements have supplanted previous forms of political engagement (Eto, 2008).

However, writers and policy-makers recognise that the value of social capital theory does not lie in a simple notion of maximising social capital. As the authors of a Cabinet Office discussion paper noted (Aldridge et al, 2002: 54);

A general drive to increase bonding social capital – the internal connectedness of micro communities – might do as much harm as good in the absence of parallel attempts to increase bridging social capital – the connections between communities. Instead, policymakers might be better advised to use a "vitamin model" for thinking about social capital which seeks optimum levels of the different types while also recognising that excessive levels of any one type could be harmful.

The distinction between bonding and bridging social capital is central to understanding the projected benefits; without bridging ties that transcend various social divides, bonding ties can become a basis for the pursuit of narrow interests, and can actively exclude outsiders. Bonding social capital is concerned with the nature of relationships and levels of connectedness within communities, it occurs amongst homogeneous communities and is often parochial and only benefits those with internal access (Leonard, 2004: 929). Bridging social capital refers to the nature and extent of relationships between communities and links across diverse social groups.

There has been debate amongst theorists as to whether the accumulation of bonding social capital will reinforce communal division, or facilitate bridging social capital. Northern Ireland is an example in which high levels of bonding social capital within two divided communities have exacerbated division, violence and exclusion; yet which also demonstrates the possibility for this form of capital to act as a foundation for bridging capital to develop (Morrow, 2006: 73-75). Therefore, as the quote above demonstrates, activities directed towards increasing bonding social capital can prove unproductive, even harmful, if a simultaneous push for the development of bridging social capital is not undertaken. Scholars have argued that to maximise social capital in any society requires that a balance be struck between embeddedness and autonomy. Overly embedded networks can act to limit trust outside the networks and so generate mistrust (Morrow, 2006). Nevertheless, the possession of both bonding and bridging social capital can be a significant asset: through investment in building a network of external relations, collective actors can augment their social capital and thereby gain benefits in the form of superior access to information, power, and solidarity; by investing in the development of their internal relations, collective actors can strengthen their collective identity and increase their capacity for collective action (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 21).

The focus of social capital theory upon relations between, and activities of, people at the local level has been enthusiastically adopted by policy-makers, whether as a means of encouraging political engagement, or in post/conflict states in which the focus is on building or rebuilding social capital to facilitate social, political and economic reconstruction. The OECD defines social capital as, 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups' (OECD, 2001). The differentiation of types of social capital has therefore proven useful. Bonding social capital, which was the focus of early theoretical work, came to be seen as too narrow and a resource with the ability to exacerbate social issues. Scholars therefore looked to bridging social capital as bonds of connectedness that are formed across diverse social groups. In this sense, social capital could be seen as a productive force across, not just within, groups – with resources shared and created rather than retained by homogenised communities. The notion that structural weaknesses and inequalities within communities in a society can be ameliorated through policies that seek to encourage the development of bridging social capital has proven appealing.

However, as Woolcock argues, a definition of social capital which emphasises networks within, between and beyond communities, must not blind us to the institutional context within which these networks are embedded, especially the role of the State. That is, whilst bonding and bridging social capital do indeed allow for the maintenance and creation of valuable ties of trust and reciprocity among networks, without links to institutions such resources may have little influence over institutional decision-making processes and outcomes. Linking social capital fits into the conceptual differentiation through the involvement of policy-makers, and the vibrancy or paucity of social capital cannot be understood independently of its broader institutional environment (Woolcock, 2001: 4). Linking capital recognises not only that trusting relationships at a similar level generate a more open civic culture, but that a normative trust between different levels of the system generates the possibility of trust operating on the ground. In other words, politics generates society as well as vice versa (Morrow, 2006: 70). The capacity of the community to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions is a key function of linking social capital (Bayat, 2005: 9). Therefore, the social capital accrued within communities, which have in turn established bridging ties of shared norms and trust, can equally link vertically to institutions in a mutually beneficial exchange. Of course, this relies upon the participation of all actors; social capital is located not in the actors but in their relations with others, therefore linking social capital would dissolve if the combination of vertical and horizontal ties falters. For policy-makers, this theoretical structure offers a framework within which to conceptualise government action on community development and reconstruction.

#### **4. Gendering Social Capital**

A key strength of social capital theory lies in its recognition of the importance of social ties and 'bottom-up' activism in facilitating development and civic participation. It shifts the analytical focus from the behaviour of individuals to the pattern of relations between agents, social units and institutions, placing the activities of individuals within the social domain. However, an underlying assumption of 'community' as a homogeneous entity has left it open to feminist critique. Lowndes refers to the 'curious silence' in the social capital debate about gender dynamics, and asserts that applying this lens can throw light on the distribution of different types of social capital within communities and the nature of the link between

networks of sociability and patterns of political engagement (2000: 533). Feminist critics have argued that this blindness to gender reflects gendered notions about citizenship: civic and political participation tends to replicate the public/private binary. Lowndes asserts that a 'disciplining discourse' has grown up around the social capital concept that renders women's political citizenship invisible (2006: 216). As Russell notes, 'the very building blocks of social networks are gendered...Women's continued responsibility for caring and domestic work tends to restrict the range of social activity they are involved in, but it does provide an opportunity to build up supportive social networks in the community' (1999: 219).

Hence, this academic bias towards 'masculine' citizenship as reflected in Putnam's assessment of social capital means that his work has largely rested upon assessing participation in, for instance, sports clubs and labour unions. Feminist scholarship has noted that men have tended to belong to core economic organisations in which information is shared about possible employment and professional advancement, whereas women are located in greater numbers in organisations related to domestic and community affairs (Norris and Inglehart, 2003: 2). In her critique of Hall's gender-based analysis of social capital in Britain, Lowndes notes that in Hall's figures, in which 34 per cent of women and 31 per cent of men undertook some voluntary activity in 1994, more than twice as many men saw their activity related to sport and recreation. Meanwhile, the voluntary activity of women lay in health, education and social services (2000: 534). Women appear to be more connected to neighbourhood networks than men, with strong patterns of social exchange between mothers of young children within the local community and a high level of social support between female neighbours (Russell, 1999). Russell concludes that whilst women's domestic role may restrict their leisure time and their opportunity for wider social contact, it could result in wider social relationships within the local community.

However, masculinist notions about what it means to be an active citizen, which is reflected in Putnam's examples of the types of activities which engender social capital, has meant that the social capital inherent in networks dominated by women has gone under-recognised and under-theorised. That is, 'the cluster of activities, values, ways of thinking and ways of doing things which have long been associated with women are all conceived as outside the political world of citizenship and largely irrelevant to it' (Susan James in Lowndes, 2000: 535). The informal care that women provide is regarded as a domestic, rather than civic, matter, thereby viewed as barriers to women's full citizenship – or in this case, to the accumulation of social capital – and thus there has been less academic focus upon the productive social capital that can inhere in these relationships of shared interest. Not only do Putnam's and others' discussions of social capital under-emphasise these more female-centric forms of participation as sources of social capital, such activities involve to a much lesser extent official membership rules or legal recognition; thereby re-inscribing a masculinist version of the social into the heart of social theory (Adkins, 2005: 197). As Kovaleinan argues, social capital theorists have rested their theoretical propositions on some extremely normative views regarding women (in *ibid*: 199).

Thus, the strong social ties and reciprocal responsibilities that can form around childcare networks, for example, are overlooked by theorists, despite these networks being a particularly strong source of social capital due to their utility for women (Childs, 2008: 6). Gender differentiation tends to precipitate the creation of informal interpersonal networks that make it possible for women to fulfil their responsibilities for the care of children and family members (Taylor, 1999). Continuing increases in women's labour-force participation



(particularly for mothers of children under 5 years), the retreat from the extended family, and the low levels in the UK of public and private child-care provision mean that networks amongst women have an added importance (Lowndes, 2000: 536). It is through such examples that feminist writers seek to make women visible as actors in the production of social capital; it is emphasised that the difference is in the nature, not level, of women's social capital in relation to men, with women's social capital often more strongly embedded in neighbourhood-specific networks of informal sociability (Lowndes, 2004: 54).

Lowndes has argued that social capital theory could learn much from feminist political theory's focus on the relationship between 'small democracies' of everyday life and the 'big democracy' of government (2000: 537), with its re-evaluation of what it means to be political and a citizen. As argued in previous sections, traditional definitions overlook women's sometime unorthodox routes to political engagement, occurring through, for instance, engagement at the community level as a starting point for wider political activism. It is by looking into the 'smaller democracies' of women's associational behaviour that one can discern their hidden (as far as traditional analyses are concerned) social capital, and demonstrate that this capital can be and indeed is being converted into political engagement. This wider analysis therefore makes visible the different, gender-specific 'circuits' of social capital that 'capitalise' political engagement in different ways (Lowndes, 2004: 49).

Nevertheless, whilst feminist theorists have demonstrated the ways in which traditional social capital scholarship has overlooked the importance of gender dynamics and women's networks in the development and application of social capital, the theory is significant from a feminist perspective for its focus on the importance of a plurality of social networks. As Lowndes and others have asserted, forming supportive networks is often a feature of women's collective activity and a strategy with which they manage exclusion from arenas of power and authority. Lin's elaboration of homophily and heterophily as organising concepts within social capital is useful here. He notes that homophily takes precedence over heterophily in ordinary and normative forms of social relations, as it is conducive to the maintenance and stability of existing resources which is generally preferred over acquiring new resources. However, Lin argues that ultimately what gives a network a significant advantage or added value is the extent of its members' heterophily in characteristics, as it gives the network access to diverse information and resources (Lin, 2006).

A network's strength lies in its ability to combine both aspects, 'if the network consists of members who have more diverse characteristics and yet is able to maintain sufficient homophily to allow contacts and networking with each other, then such a network ought to benefit from its members having such mixed characteristics, by being able to become both...stable and flexible, cohesive yet dynamic' (Lin, 2006). This is an especially pertinent point for women in Northern Ireland during and in the aftermath of the Troubles. Chapter 3 will review existing analysis that details how their shared experiences during the conflict, for which a hyper-masculinised security dogma was given precedence, meant that women developed cross-community networks of support centred around collective interests irrespective of ethnonational affiliation. Certainly, a women's movement which sprang out of a sectarian conflict possessed 'diverse characteristics', with many individual groups located in and serving strongly bonded Protestant or Catholic areas. However, it was through these heterophilous experiences that women across the divide established a collective identity as women - of homophily - that created a movement from disparate groups.

Feminist scholars have therefore opened the social capital debate to a wider range of political and policy implications, turning the spotlight away from male-dominated associational activity, informed by a masculinist bias in democratic theory, onto the 'smaller democracies' of women's voluntary activity, thereby highlighting the richness both of women's activity in, and contribution to, civil society. This is despite feminist ambivalence towards civil society as a site of female empowerment. As Phillips has asserted, 'celebrating civil society as the sphere of freedom and autonomy is not really an option for feminism, given the inequalities that so often mar the cosy associational world' (Phillips, 2002: 87). In her analysis of 'quangos', which have supplanted local government in certain areas of service provision at the community level, Sperling notes that the proportion of women members is still largely unfavourable, whilst in the higher decision-making centres of such organisations, the presence of women becomes even less visible (Sperling, 1998: 476).

Nevertheless, civil society as an associational sphere organised primarily for structured association, linked closely to organisation and activity and formulated by the mutual cooperation and collectivity of its members, is a potential field for the political empowerment of citizens and those who are marginalised from formal political institutions (Eto, 2008). Anne Scott has written that, 'for women...voluntary association became a place to exercise the public influence otherwise denied them; in a sense they provided an alternative career ladder, one that was open to women when few others were' (in O'Neill and Gidengil, 2006: 277). For women, civil society has the potential to offer an alternative route to obtaining political influence outside the traditional male-dominated spheres of power.

Feminist scholars, in analyses of women and civil society, have depicted a women-centred, 'private sphere' model in which women build expanded private sphere relationships and are empowered through those connections (Stall and Stoecker, 1998: 732). This women-centred organising therefore endeavours to elide the boundaries between public and private life, between household and civil society. This reflects the viewpoint of scholars who deem the everyday lives of people at home to be connected both to politics and to economic activities in the marketplace, and thus dispute the separation of the private sphere from the public (Eto, 2008). The private sphere, when considered apolitical, effectively erases many of the contributions women make to community life. Therefore, the organisation of women into civil society organisations actively seeking to represent women's issues acts as a means of connecting the 'everyday' lives of women with politics, transforming women's 'private' concerns into wider public issues: 'the women-centred model approaches politics from an experience and consciousness of the exclusionary qualities of the public-private sphere split, which becomes embedded in a matrix of domination along structural axes of gender, race, and social class and hides the significance of women's work in local settings' (Stall and Stoecker, 1998: 742). For the purposes of the social capital debate, one can therefore discern in networks of women's sociability the underlying shared experiences and interests that knit such networks together.

As such, feminist scholars have looked at the women's movement as a site within which democratic engagement for women is expressed and nurtured. Harrell argues that the movement centres around an engagement with local politics and social movement activities more than it does with traditional forums focused on national politics, and is more likely to be organised in less hierarchical ways and to focus on creating consensus (Harrell, 2009: 6). This focus on non-hierarchically organised networks and mutual empowerment suggests that women are in a position to be good 'social capitalists', due to social capital theory's emphasis

on the maintenance of social relationships. Women-focused social movements are described as more 'fluid' in structure due to the manner in which activism is embedded in beliefs and everyday actions; leading, it is argued, to a more diffuse, autonomous and local arrangement (Taylor, 1999). Of course, a key point of interest is the types of social capital that accrue in the women's movement, and how this is deployed. Gidengil et al have pointed to a gap in political knowledge for women in comparison to men: 'Even when they have accumulated equivalent stocks of social capital, women know significantly less about politics than their male counterparts' (Gidengil, Goodyear-Grant, Nevitte and Blais, 2006: 256). If social capital really does foster political engagement, women's lack of political interest would have to be explained by a social capital deficit, and yet women have as much or more than men. This discrepancy begs an investigation into how social capital is or is not transformed into democratic assets (O'Neill and Gidengil, 2006: 6).

In terms of social capital, women therefore do not appear to reap the same returns as men on their investments. For the women's movement, the political knowledge deficit inherent in women's social capital could suggest a barrier to the achievement of shared goals. It may be that women's groups have achieved very high levels of bonding social capital, such that supporting other women in their communities can be effectively undertaken. However, one could argue that, as stated above, grassroots activism and the empowerment of other women within the group network is seen as an end in itself, such that other ties are not sought. This could have implications for the achievement of social aims; the absence of bridging social capital links with other social movements could lessen opportunities for more effective 'joined-up' activism, whilst if linking social capital with policy-makers and institutions is not actively pursued due to an under-valuing of political engagement and knowledge and the prizing above all of inter-community and network relationships, women's groups risk a position in which their interests remain unheard at the level of policy formation and implementation.

Moreover, strong bonding ties, both within women's groups and homogeneous communities, risk placing a disproportionately heavy duty for community support on women. As Leonard has argued in reference to Northern Ireland, social support networks emerged as ways of challenging the Government's inability to provide employment for its citizens (2004: 933). As part of this, bonding social capital came to be seen as a political strategy rather than simply a solution to individual or community disadvantage, relieving government of sole or even majority responsibility for local development and community relations. The higher proportion of women than men who are active in voluntary organisations means that any 'roll back' of the State at the local level would lead to women taking an even greater share of responsibility as part of their 'extended domestic sphere' role in the community. Further, it places a greater burden on (largely already under-resourced) women's organisations, whose grassroots work is further stretched.

An examination of women's social capital therefore necessitates consideration of how both bonding and bridging social capital are operating within and amongst women's networks, and how the accrued resources are being utilised. As discussed above, for women in conflict and post-conflict societies in which ethnic tensions are the organising feature, bridging social capital is an important phenomenon connecting women from different communities and establishing a foundation of reciprocity and trust based on their shared identities as women. Chapter 3 will review existing scholarship which analyses this occurrence in relation to women in Northern Ireland, and establish a foundation for understanding the role of linking social capital. Whilst the women's movement has emerged from conflict with a great deal of internal,

shared knowledge and collective resources from which policy-makers can benefit, there are limits to its ability to link to policy- and decision-making. Manchanda argues that, 'a just peace involves the reworking of the gender status quo' (2001: 28); however, the status quo of a political system which remains closed to women's collective interests and representation suggests that linking social capital is insufficiently established. This points to a tension between a possible tendency of governments to view women's groups as useful resources for reconciliation and utilising their skills and knowledge, and yet not recognising that the movement's internal coherence is founded upon shared goals and needs and that full democratisation cannot be achieved through gender-blind policies.

## **5. A Feminist Social Capital Approach for Northern Ireland**

Such considerations allude to the value of using a social capital frame for a feminist study of the Northern Ireland women's movement. Feminist scholarship that has engaged critically with social capital has highlighted the potential for the build-up of social capital in the breadth and depth of networks forged amongst women, and has critiqued the masculine bias within traditional social capital scholarship that fails to problematise an assumed male citizen and thus neglects social capital within more female-dominated networks. As Adkins has argued, women's networks are likely to be qualitatively different from male networks, with women not usually belonging to networks centred on economic advantage but rather those commanding fewer economic resources and relying more on time and non-monetised labour exchanges (Adkins, 2005: 200). As outlined above and to be explored further in Chapter 3, the Northern Ireland women's movement has historically corresponded to this description, suggesting that there is merit in conceptualising the women's movement as a network with the potential for the accrual of social capital.

Whilst social capital has provoked concern for feminist scholars, with some resisting, even dismissing, social capital as a theory that can be useful to the feminist project due to its status as a 'troubled concept' at best (Adkins, 2005), others have noted the strong engagement of policy makers with social capital theory and asserted the importance of a critical gender perspective if social divisions and existing power relations are not to be strengthened (Molyneux, 2002: 185). This aligns strongly with wider feminist political science in its efforts to re-conceptualise what it is to 'do politics', highlighting activity outside the formal sphere of masculinised high politics and seeking to show women's collective action in civil society as political in nature. More broadly, it fits with feminist scholars' deep scepticism about knowledge which claims to be universal and objective but which is in reality based on men's lives (Tickner, 2006: 21). Indeed, as Reinharz argues, 'making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the centre, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men – all continue to be elements of feminist research' (in *ibid*: 25). Feminist scholars who have engaged with social capital have taken up such concerns, both by gendering social capital and demonstrating the possibility for feminist analysis using social capital theory, and seeking to bringing a gender analysis to existing social capital policy debates, in areas that have real impact on the social, political and economic reality for women as civic actors (see Molyneux, 2002).

This feminist social capital context has particular salience in relation to Northern Ireland. The prevalence of social capital in political narratives, amongst both policy-makers and

civil society organisations, suggests that the study of social capital in the women's movement has the potential to contribute to a live debate. However, government-commissioned social capital research (among others, Campbell et al, 2008 and Cairns et al, 2003) is dominated by a consideration of the levels of bonding and bridging social capital among the Protestant and Catholic communities and what this reveals about the health of political and civic life in a post-Peace Agreement Northern Ireland; indeed, as will be explored further in subsequent chapters, social capital theory is overwhelmingly deployed in the context of the 'community relations' policy debate. For instance, a Department for Social Development document seeks to provide a framework for assessing the benefits of community sector work by using, 'the concept of social capital as a means of capturing that added value' and ensuring that, 'the return on the investment can be demonstrated' (DSD, 2006: 2 and 18). Voluntary organisations have therefore been asked to make a case for their utility to the Government's project of building good relations between communities within a social capital framework. The specific contribution of women's civil society networks and the social capital that accrues within and between them both to 'community relations' and, crucially for the women's movement, to the political and civic environment in Northern Ireland including greater equality between men and women, is under-theorised and thus represents a gap in the scholarly and policy literature.

Nevertheless, a greater understanding of social capital in the women's movement has the potential to contribute to the policy discussion about social capital in Northern Ireland between policy-makers, civil society organisations and scholars. As Molyneux notes in relation to development agencies, a social capital approach has brought to their attention the quality of the local social fabric, the importance of forms of solidarity and cooperation, and has revealed the positive and negative effects of development projects on the communities they are designed to assist (Molyneux, 2002: 168). Considering the high profile of community development in Northern Ireland and the heavy involvement of women's organisations in this agenda, the under-examination of the nature of bridging and linking social capital in the women's movement could be said to represent a gap in this discussion in practical terms, as well as an omission in the understanding of women's movement organisation, collective activism and interaction with the policy-making process. As will be explored over the course of this study, this is part of a wider ongoing trend of framing equality in ethnonational terms and judging projects accordingly, particularly with regard to the community development policy agenda, and under-problematising gender inequality to the detriment of work undertaken in this regard by women's organisations.

The incorporation of a social capital analysis into a feminist theoretical approach, whilst contributing to the live discussion of social capital in Northern Ireland, can provide insights into women's mobilisation, particularly in a society in which women's political contribution has been marginalised, and in which social capital is narrowly conceived and does not appear concerned with the potential contribution of women's social capital to greater democratisation. A social capital analysis can reveal the extent and nature both of the women's movement's ability to achieve consensus, and its interaction with policy-makers, alongside a feminist theoretical base that frames the activities of the women's movement as political in nature. To re-quote Lin, 'what is needed is to specify conditions under which network features such as density or openness lead to the capturing of certain resources that generate certain kinds of returns' (Lin, 2006: 54). This study seeks to specify how both density and openness work to generate social capital in the women's movement, what resources are captured and what kind of returns they wish to generate, and therefore understand what this case study can

contribute to debates around gender and democracy in a post-conflict society. This analysis concerns process rather than outcomes, both within the movement in terms of how and why certain themes and strategies are prioritised and bridging ties are established and institutionalised, and with regard to the relationship between the movement and political institutions and the linking ties that are formed.

## **6. Agency, Leadership and social capital in the women's movement**

As explored at length above, feminist scholars have found the existing social capital literature to be limited in its ability to meaningfully address the kinds of social capital that accrue in the women's movement or female-centric organising. They have demonstrated the utility of using a social capital lens to explore the women's movement, and frame the nature of its organisation and relationship with government. However, the particular circumstances that prevail in Northern Ireland mean that it is also important to recognise the role of leadership and agency within the women's movement, and to situate this within the larger social capital analysis.

Agency and the role of the individual as fields of enquiry and analysis within a social capital approach have been introduced by scholars to unpick, 'the neoclassical principle of rationality [that] has maintained dominance...thus treatments of norms and networks that fall under the label of social capital tend to overlook the social and political context that determine the nature and impact of norms and networks' (Christoforou, 2011: 686). Christoforou draws on the idea of the socially-embedded individual conception of the self to argue for a view that sees individuals as active beings able to provoke social change, contrary to neoclassical theory that eliminates the individual altogether; thereby seeking to, 'reinstate the "social" in social capital' (ibid: 695 and 699). Thus, whilst social capital is a collectively-held resource, individual agency may be seen as having a central role to play in converting social capital into strategic action for social change.

The interplay of individual action with collectively-held social capital resources has been explored by social capital scholars. In his comparative developmental study of villages in India, Krishna found that whilst social capital represents a propensity for mutually beneficial collective action, this potential needs to be activated. He notes that to ensure the successful performance of social capital, resources need to be strategically marshalled and directed toward incentives available within the broader institutional environments. Crucially, 'without the support of capable new leaders, however, they have been unable to add significantly to their existing resource base' (Krishna, 2001: 934-936). Krishna concludes that social capital can be made more productive through measures that seek to enhance agency capacity (ibid: 939). Therefore, just as feminist critics have pointed to the de-gendering inherent in social capital theory and sought to draw out the value of social capital for conceptualising women-centred organising, scholars have also endeavoured to introduce the role of individual agency and leadership.

Feminist theory has not dealt extensively with issues of leadership in feminist activism and women's mobilisation (whether in a conflict/post-conflict setting or otherwise). However, whilst there is a general paucity of literature specifically on feminist leadership (Kirton and Healy, 2012: 983), feminist scholars have considered whether there is something distinct about women's leadership. It has been noted that collective empowerment and social change/justice goals are central (ibid), along with a collaborative style that seeks consensus building as a way

to set direction (Chin, 2004: 5). Feminist leadership is, 'about actively working to help others gain equitable shares of power and that power is used to empower women in society' (Bingham, 2008: 489). Feminist analyses have therefore uncovered common features which point to a particular feminist style of leadership.

Moreover, and important for the purposes of this study, some scholars of women's leadership have sought, 'to move beyond the notion of leadership for the sake of assuming individual power to a model of collective leadership for social justice and social change' (Norwood and Zahau, 2011: 229). The emphasis on collaboration means that: 'Power emanates from consensus rather than from being the means for achieving consensus' (Rusaw, 2005: 389). Therefore, whilst there is not a body of feminist literature analysing the role of leadership agency in the women's movement and feminist activism for strategic direction or effecting collective transformation, feminist scholars have identified the importance of collaboration and consensus as the basis upon which feminist leadership is built. This is a notable feature of leadership in the Northern Ireland movement, and one could hypothesise, a reason for movement leaders' ability to effect strategic change and establish linking ties.

Feminist theory's under-elaboration of leadership in the study of women's movements means that this study will draw upon analyses of leadership in social movement theory, which is allied and complementary to the introduction of agency and leadership in social capital theory. The study of leadership in this context has emerged from a sense of frustration with traditional social movement analyses dominated by structuralist assumptions and ambitions, in which exclusive importance is given to structures (Jasper, 2004: 2). It has been argued that the study of social movement leadership can reveal the ways in which leaders have the capacity to mobilise social networks, 'movement leadership is an important complex phenomenon that affects the origins and outcomes of movements. By neglecting leadership, political process models fail to shed light on another important source of movement agency' (Morris, 2000: 450). Morris argues that leaders possess and deploy charisma, institutional resources and the ability to read the external political structure, all of which are crucial to the development of a movement's cultural frame and in mobilising participants (ibid). Indeed, scholars looking to situate agency in the study of social movements have called for, 'research into strategic choice in a range of contexts; the choices leaders make in recruiting others, those of individuals in deciding whether to attend an event, the choices of opponents faced with protest, the decisions made in the heat of a confrontation, those to change tactics or ideologies' (Jasper, 2004: 12).

This call brings human agency at the individual level to the centre of the study of social movements; acknowledging that social movements are not spontaneous, unorganised, and unstructured phenomena (Morris, 2000: 445), but rather are subject to the direction and catalysing influence of individuals as participants and leaders situated in 'nodal positions' and possessing institutional resources. As such, the introduction of leadership agency has the potential to contribute to a larger social capital analysis of social movements in general, and this study in particular. Ling and Dale argue that agency, 'is the intentional causality and process that brings about a novel state of affairs which would not have occurred otherwise...While networks can build social capital...agency at the individual and community levels is needed to mobilise this social capital...Both agency and social capital must be available in a community in order to affect meaningful change' (Ling and Dale, 2013: 3). Agency, then, plays an activating role in social capital.

Therefore, recognition of the role of leadership agency elucidates how social movement leaders accumulate and mobilise both bonding and bridging social capital through their grassroots membership, and linking social capital in their access to and engagement with elite networks and institutional actors. Purdue notes that, 'the communal social capital of a group or network is concentrated and embodied in its representatives or leaders...Leaders prove their competence by meeting their obligations to the community...and gain goodwill towards their innovative projects, which involve creating new norms, including norms governing collaboration with the local authority' (Purdue, 2001: 2216). Therefore, the agency of social movement leaders is critical to the development of social capital at the bonding and bridging levels; but further, to the movement's ability to develop linking ties and thus create strategic alliances and advantages which advance the movement's aims.

Scholarship has demonstrated how individual agency connects to network formation in order to build sufficient social capital to engender community development outcomes. Using a case study outlining the actions of a local community initiative in a marginalised neighbourhood of Vancouver, Dale and Newman conclude that the organisation under scrutiny was able to achieve long-term viability by, 'building social capital through first, coming together in a self-organising network through bonding social capital, and second, leadership by a few key individuals was critical to this network moving from 'getting by' to 'getting ahead' by augmenting access to linking ties, initially bridging and later, vertical social capital' (Dale and Newman, 2008: 18). They note that, 'a lack of access to external resources, and sometimes conflicting government policies and incentives...[can] actually hinder or destroy the existing social capital at the community level...hence, the criticality of networks to create bridging and vertical ties, especially important for marginalised communities to gain a measure of autonomy and control over their future' (ibid).

As such, critical analysis of the role of leadership – in which the agency of individuals in nodal positions with multi-faceted personal and institutional assets is acknowledged - can help to understand the transition of social movements from networks with strong bonding and/or bridging social capital to those with sustainable linking ties. The role of leadership agency can also contribute to an understanding of a movement's strategic re-positioning and choice of alliances; something of particular significance in relation to the Northern Ireland women's movement, in which a transition from bridging ties at the Assembly level via the Women's Coalition to a strategy oriented towards establishing linking ties can be analysed through an social capital and leadership agency lens.

Therefore, as elaborated earlier in the chapter, just as the incorporation of a social capital analysis into a feminist theoretical approach can provide insights into women's mobilisation in Northern Ireland that have not otherwise been reached, so too does considering the interplay of 'feminist leadership agency' with the development of bridging and linking social capital. That is, understanding the 'activating' role of feminist leadership in the Northern Ireland women's movement as part of the process of determining its strategic direction in the post-Women's Coalition transition. Moreover, it provides an important theoretical frame for explaining the functioning of a movement that appears to centre around a core leadership group of women, many of whom have multiple representations across a range of women's organisations and a long-standing history of women's movement involvement. This theoretical foundation allows an analysis of this core group's agency as leaders in moving the women's movement from 'getting by' to 'getting ahead', through developing linking ties via strategic re-positioning and institutional engagement.



Moreover, it also offers a framework for considering the possibility of women's movement leadership cooption through the existence of linking ties. Seung-kyung Kim and Kyounghee Kim describe the implications of the leadership of the South Korean women's movement's relative institutionalisation into government through a politics of engagement and 'state feminism' - taking part in electoral politics and creating gender policy (Kim and Kim, 2011: 391). They note a number of negative consequences, including compromised independence due to financial reliance on government, which in turn diverted their attention away from a more radical agenda. In the Northern Ireland women's movement, in which a core group of women act as agents both of bridging ties (as leaders of organisations and networks), and of linking ties (as interlocutors with policy-makers and domestic and international institutions), the implications of this leadership agency for the health of bridging and linking social capital is considered in this thesis.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study will be grounded in the assertion, based on existing literature, that women in Northern Ireland forged strong bonding and bridging ties, based on their common experiences in a state organised around an entrenched conception of security and overtly masculinised sectarian politics. The thesis will consider whether women in Northern Ireland have used and continue to use collective action - based on a common understanding of women's needs and interests – in order to seek to gender an enduringly male-dominated political system. As such, social capital is a useful theoretical framework with which to explore this case study. It emphasises the importance of collective action and productive ties for a healthy democracy below and beyond the formal political arena.

Further, feminist scholars have shown that social capital can be broadened to provide a conceptual framework for women's collective activities, and thus write women into the social capital debate; whilst scholars have argued persuasively for the introduction of agency and its interplay with leadership in a social capital analysis. There is therefore a convincing case for a feminist social capital analysis in Northern Ireland, not least because the language of social capital has permeated social policy to such a degree, at least rhetorically; but further, because a feminist take on social capital theory which considers the role of leadership agency offers the possibility of understanding how the Northern Ireland women's movement mobilises both collectively and vertically with policy-makers to seek greater gender equality.

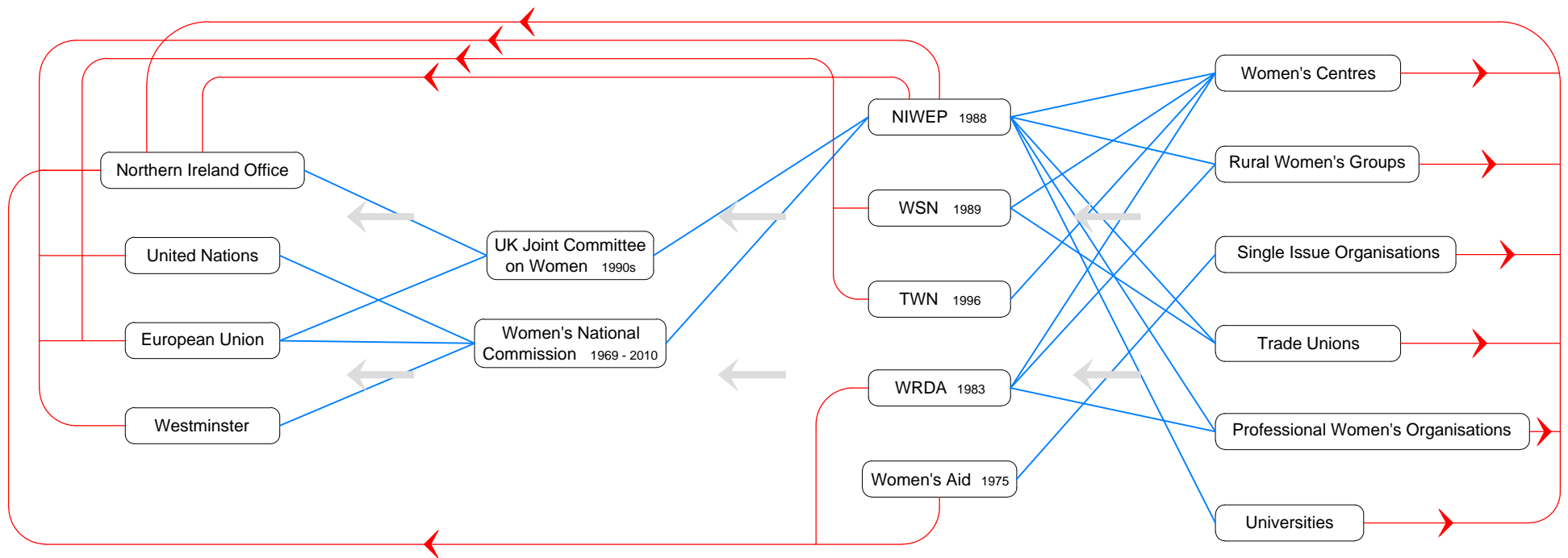


Figure 1

"Channels for influencing policy-making in Northern Ireland: The women's movement's bridging and linking social capital before the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

## Chapter 3

### **From bonding to bridging ties: the development of the women's movement and Northern Ireland Women's Coalition**

#### **1. Introduction**

Conflict between and within Protestant and Catholic communities has made the resolution of the constitutional question and ethnonational division the driving force in formal politics and the determining factor informing the work of community activism (Murtagh, 2008: 34). It is within this context that the experience of women and their position in Northern Irish society must be understood. The 'telling' of the Northern Ireland conflict and peace-building process has been conducted in terms which are inherently gendered and evoke male protagonists, as Cockburn and Zarkov note, 'regardless of what a female non-combatant may have survived and whatever heroic acts of courage she may have committed, a woman is expected to devote her attention to the returning male 'war hero', and there is a tendency to minimise, if not outright deny, her war experience' (Cockburn and Zarkov, 2002).

However, the Troubles were essentially blind to the traditional soldier-civilian distinction, in which the sectarian segregation of residential space meant that the home could and did become a place of directed violence (McDowell, 2008: 339). Afshar argues that the myth of, 'valiant men at the battlefield defending the honour of their wives and protecting the family back home' needs to be exploded. Wars are increasingly fought on the home fronts (in Afshar and Eade, 2004: 47). In Northern Ireland, this 'geography of war' brought conflict into the streets and the home. It is therefore analytically naïve to define the question of peace and political development as a matter largely confined to the male-dominated political and paramilitary arenas. As such, the activities of women, who overwhelmingly populate the voluntary sector, have been and continue to be of central importance.

This chapter will set out the development of the women's movement as collective projects arising as an extension of the domestic space to which women in Northern Ireland have been discursively confined, which served as the foundation for the establishment of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition party. It will show that in the years between the growth of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s and the Peace Agreement of 1998, women's groups were coming together into a collective movement and developing bridging social capital, by increasingly working to cross the sectarian divide and collaborate according to shared goals and experiences as women; before exploring the creation of the NIWC and development of the women's movement in a post-Belfast/Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland. Women's exclusion from political and public parity by a masculinist rhetoric of security and the constitutional question, led women to engage with the legacy of conflict by addressing its impact upon their lives; namely, within the community and home, where the issues they took up could be seen as their 'appropriate' concerns (Evason, 1991: 49).

In this sense, then, women were active in the politicisation of the private sphere. Feminist scholars have argued that the association of women with naturalness and the private sphere not only leads to a practical exclusion of women from political life, but also constructs conceptions of politics, rationality and justice such that faculties associated with femininity are excluded, by definition, from these realms (Longo, 2001: 271). The act of making the domestic political is therefore a radical step in the redefinition of the political by the appropriation of the hitherto non-political domestic realm as a site of political consciousness and activity. For

feminist social capital scholars, looking into the 'smaller democracies' of women's associational behaviour can reveal both the social capital that is being generated, and how this capital is converted into political engagement. This chapter will review scholarship about the development of the women's movement during the Troubles and outline the ways in which this has been characteristic of the Northern Ireland women's movement, conceptualising the development of the women's movement from atomised mobilisation efforts to larger-scale associational behaviour as the generation and 'spending' of social capital through political engagement.

## **2. 'Accidental activists' and the development of the women's movement**

Much of the impetus behind the drive to increase women's participation and influence in politics in Northern Ireland originated from within the voluntary sector. This section will demonstrate that women's voluntary activism as in any sense a political project grew out of collective action at the grassroots, rather than informing it. The recognition that local concerns and women's interests were going unrepresented, and that women's collective efforts merited support and recognition, prompted groups of women to mobilise beyond the grassroots and seek a more representative politics. This was facilitated by the unprecedented opportunity of a state undergoing reconfiguration both towards and after the 1998 Peace Agreement (Murtagh, 2008: 26), and the chance to move beyond a purely ethnonational debate towards a richer political spectrum.

Therefore, the nature of women's involvement and numerical concentration in the voluntary arena must be explained. It has been stressed by scholars and women themselves that female activists in this sphere did not conceive of their work as 'public', similar to politics or other comparable activities. They were mobilising to meet the immediate local needs of childcare, health and support services within a political system overwhelmingly concerned with the security situation at the expense of social provision (Wilford, 1996: 47). Conflict created an absence of 'normal politics', which in turn resulted in extensive civic engagement, with a dense network of associations filling in the democratic deficit of direct rule to make Northern Ireland a 'movement society' (Cowell-Meyers, 2014: 67). In a small population of fewer than two million, Northern Ireland has between 5000 and 6000 voluntary associations, of whose staff 60 per cent are women (Meehan, 2003: 15). The prioritisation of security and ethnonational politics meant that Northern Ireland's political institutions were neither empowered to provide, nor motivated to offer, the kind of multi-layered system of government needed to address the multiplicity of citizens' needs beyond management of the security situation (Murtagh, 2008: 23). As such, voluntary groups sprang up at the local level to provide a support infrastructure.

Therefore, with the prioritisation of security and the constitutional question, and the neglect of the kind of social affairs which are the concern of citizens at the local level (Hinds, 1999: 112), voluntary activism and support services became a key coping mechanism within local communities in the face of scarce welfare facilities. Women came to numerically dominate such groups and services as both participants and facilitators. A highly masculinised security discourse diminished concerns not of immediate relevance to the negotiation of security interests, devaluing women's experiences and interests. As Rooney noted, 'there is the additional political gesture of avoiding allusions to women in a sectarian context. This works to conceal women, obviate gender and ignore the many inequalitarian consequences of

sectarianism' (Rooney, 2006: 356). This process of 'disappearing' women and gender creates a narrative dominated by male protagonists, Republican martyrs within Nationalist rhetoric or terrorists elsewhere, and a discourse of political nationalism which springs from masculinised memory, humiliation and hope (Cockburn, 1998: 42). As Chapter 2 argued, feminist scholars have challenged this 'disappearing' of women's agency and the masculinised systems that tend to dictate post-conflict governance structures.

The absence of women from the security narrative could nevertheless not disguise the reality of armed incursions into the space to which women were rhetorically confined. As Edgerton has written of nationalist women, with the threat to their homes by the security forces a real and lived experience, many working-class nationalist women became politically active out of necessity: 'In short, the traditional maternal role as guardian of the family was being confronted by external alien elements. Little wonder that working-class women in besieged nationalist areas were spurred into action' (1986: 67). It can therefore be said that the disjuncture between women's alleged exclusion from the constitutional and armed conflicts because of gender on the one hand, and the reality of military invasions into the domestic arena and the exclusion from policy debates which directly impacted women's lives, contributed to the development of a collective political consciousness of women *as women* (Pickering, 2000: 59 and McWilliams, 1995).

The security situation, as defined by male-dominated political and paramilitary systems, took precedence over all else; indeed, women who protested the harassment of the soldiers and police were much less able to challenge the domestic violence of men in their own homes. Only with difficulty did Women's Aid, formed in 1975, bring these kinds of issues into the open, because so much attention had been focused on combating political violence rather than on the abuse of women (McWilliams, 2010: 21). As such, women in Northern Ireland became 'accidental activists', a term coined by Susan Hyatt and based on her work with women on a Bradford council estate, to describe activism, 'born of the immediate experience of social injustice, rather than as a consequence of a pre-existing ideological belief.' Hyatt notes that through such accidental activism, women who previously did not see themselves as in any way political became advocates and agents for social change (Hyatt, 1992).

As part of feminist theory's interest in gendered citizenship, feminist scholars have explored the importance of civil society activism for cultivating citizenship, arguing that women often operate across the public-private boundaries to effect change on behalf of their families and local communities, with civil society activism representing a preferable, and sometimes stronger, site of political citizenship to formal political engagement (Lister, 2011: 33-34). The greater individual and collective self-confidence that stems from collective local action, as individuals and groups come together to see themselves as political actors and effective citizens, is particularly true for women who may be alienated from formal politics and find engagement with community participation more rewarding (Lister, 1997: 33).

The emphasis placed on women's ties to the domestic, and the latter's distance from the 'true' issues facing Northern Ireland, therefore created a vacuum at the local level which women came to fill. Government statistics compiled in 2000 point to the social and political imbalances which local women's organisations sought to address, revealing that almost 90 per cent of the victims of over 14,000 domestic violence incidents were women, whilst 83 per cent of sexual crimes were committed against women. Meanwhile, 92 per cent of lone parents in 2001 were women, and the number of day nursery places per 1000 children aged 0-4 was 62.4, compared to 95.0 in England (Breitenbach and Galligan, 2004: vii, 38 and 51). As the authors

assert, the unequal division of labour in the home contributes to gender inequality, along with, 'the imbalance in power between women and men, whether in political, economic or civic life, or in the home. At its most extreme this is reflected in the abuse of power represented by domestic violence' (ibid: 103). Therefore, statistical evidence of women's inequality and marginalisation are linked to the broader context of the power imbalance between women and men. One may hypothesise that the markedly low numbers of women in positions of public authority, and the often unrecognised contribution of women in voluntary groups (ibid: viii), left few voices to lobby for issues central to local development and to the advancement of equality between men and women.

Nevertheless, some women in the late 1960s and 1970s did challenge the politico-security status quo through the civil rights movement, which was to seed the later development of the women's movement alongside work done by women at the local level (McWilliams, 1995: 18). Involvement with organisations like the Campaign for Social Justice, the trade union movement and other civil liberties groups brought women like Ann Hope and Bernadette Devlin, the latter of whom was the youngest woman elected to Westminster in 1969, into prominence within the civil rights movement and laid the foundation for exercising ongoing leadership agency and strategic direction. For others, the route to activism via the civil rights movement began at university; Bronagh Hinds became involved with civil rights at Queens University Belfast (Byrne, 2009: 77-78). This awareness about civil rights in the early 1970s developed the understanding of women's rights by the mid-70s: 'This consciousness about the need for legislation to combat religious discrimination had a decisive influence on the women who later lobbied for the introduction of legislation on sex discrimination' (McWilliams, 1995: 19).

Women's rights formed little part of the civil rights agenda in the 1960s and 1970s, prompting many women from the movement to organise separately and draw in a coalition of partners to form the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM) in 1975 (Byrne, 2009: 78), as a hoped-for nucleus of a mass movement of working-class and middle-class women (Roulston, 1997: 60). One such partner was the Women's Action Group, formed within Queen's University Belfast to bring, 'the role of women in Northern Ireland into line with that of their sisters in Britain' (Fearon, 1999: 3). This hope proved short-lived, however, as ideological disagreements took hold and caused the NIWRM to succumb to its divisions (Roulston, 1997: 60). Roulston points to the obstacles to cooperation among feminist groups on various occasions, with fragmentation within feminism growing simultaneously to the greater awareness of its tenets (ibid). Moreover, McWilliams notes that the dominant voice within the women's movement in the pre-Peace Agreement period was allied to nationalism, with some Protestant women expressing a sense of alienation (McWilliams, 1995: 27). Cowell-Meyers therefore concludes that whilst there were hundreds of women's groups by the 1990s, the women's movement during the Troubles was fragmented and over-shadowed by the conflict (2014: 67).

Nevertheless, as Byrne argues, women activists at this time began developing the transversal practice of continued identification with their separate ethnonational communities, whilst working towards an understanding of the experiences of other women. McWilliams observes that: 'Over the years the women's movements in Northern Ireland and elsewhere have recognised that conflict within and between women's groups is not in itself unhealthy but can become so if it is not effectively managed' (McWilliams, 1995: 25). It was therefore this period that forged networks of solidarity and ways of working across traditional political

boundaries, albeit in a less than straightforward linear process (Byrne, 2009: 81; see also McWilliams, 1995: 33 and Murtagh, 2008: 26).

Evason describes the 1980s as a time in which women's groups sought to defend the few gains made, with women at, 'the forefront in the struggle against the ideological onslaught on the welfare state...and the uncaring, macho, managerialism that now dominates so much of the public sector' (Evason, 1991: 40). These grassroots engagement and social change groups emphasised specific issues and demonstrated a more action-oriented approach, rather than a generalised opposition to violence as demonstrated in movements like the Peace People, which from 1976 held a number of high-profile marches and used gendered, maternal tropes to frame their appeal (Byrne, 2009: 82). Locally-based projects emerging from women's groups endeavoured to achieve their goals by ensuring a genuinely participatory structure through open debate and a broad perspective (McCartney, 1995: 222). These women's collectives were established in and served particular groups of women, whilst also establishing links with other organisations both within and beyond their neighbourhood; thereby pointing to the development of nascent bridging ties.

One important achievement in the development of such ties was the establishment of the Falls Women's Centre in the mid-1980s to serve the women of the Falls Road in Belfast, offering advice and counselling, classes for women and events and excursions for children; yet it also developed connections with the wider women's movement through involvement in the Women's Information Day, the abortion fund to provide women going to England with financial assistance, and the Women's Support Network, a joint Catholic-Protestant effort to coordinate the women's movement by serving as the policy voice of the women's centres (Evason, 1991: 52-53). The Women's Information Group (now Women's Information Northern Ireland), formed in 1980, has provided an environment for women from both Protestant and Catholic communities to come together with a non-political ethos to discuss 'bread and butter' issues. Its monthly meetings are held alternatively in Protestant and Catholic communities, and often serve as the first time that women have entered the territory of the 'other' community (Hillyard, McWilliams and Ward, 2006: 26). Nevertheless, McWilliams argues that the Women's Information Group provided the kind of supportive political environment that suited the women involved, with each becoming knowledgeable about the issues and gaining the confidence and experience to maintain links after their specific campaigns had been dissolved (McWilliams, 1995: 31).

It has been estimated that there were more than 1,000 groups operating for women in the period before the Peace Agreement, roughly one for every 750 women in the region (Fearon, 1996: 57-58). Figure 1 shows the emergent bridging ties, as grassroots, single issue and other allied groups were beginning to bridge ethnonational and other divides to work together in organisations like the Women's Information Group, region-wide advocacy groups like the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), networking groups like the Women's Institute, and training and education providers like the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) (Fearon, 1996: 57-58). For the raft of women's centres, committees and other women-focused agencies that emerged in this period and which were established originally to cover social welfare issues, their structures allowed for continued contact across ethnonational divisions. From the mid-1980s, they were able to overcome the fragmentation of the earlier period that caused the NIWRM to dissolve, by acknowledging their differences and working innovatively across traditional political boundaries (McWilliams, 1995: 33).

The Women's Support Network (WSN) demonstrates the development of increasing and sustained bridging ties between the two communities, and as will be shown in later chapters, serves to represent women's centres in the bridging and linking mechanisms that connect them into the women's movement as well as wider governance and consultation structures. WSN arose when Belfast City Council withdrew funding from a women's centre in a Catholic area. Protestant women from across Belfast joined the protest, and from that expression of solidarity grew the Network (Hope, 2006: 3). Women's centres often work at the grassroots level amongst the most marginalised people in the community, acting in reality as vital local infrastructure organisations plugging the gaps of an inadequate welfare regime. Yet further, this work is crucial to fostering community engagement and renewal, and combating social isolation (WRDA, 2005: 5).

Both this work and the social capital value of women's organisations were recognised by the political elite in the pre-Peace Agreement period. In confirming the allocation of financial aid to women's organisations in Northern Ireland, former Secretary of State Peter Hain noted that, 'we recognise the significant contribution [they] have made to the peace process, often being the only civic organisations able to operate in some of the most violent and contested spaces. Their continued support for the peace building process is highly valued by all my Ministers' (Hain, 2005). This comment represents a recognition of the vital link between local voluntary activism and the establishment of peace. Further, as the 'only' organisations able to work in such insecure communities, one can read an appreciation of the particular strength inherent in women's groups, in their focus on social needs and recognition that lasting peace depends on stability and welfare at the local level. Whether or not this acknowledgment has proven to be sustained and converted into political engagement by linking to institutions and policy-makers is a question for this study.

This instance of Protestant and Catholic women jointly protesting along shared concerns represented a growing trend amongst the former to challenge the State with which they identified and which was perceived by some to be under threat. Writing in 1991, Evason noted that the sense among Protestant women that anything which smacked of protest or was concerned with rights must by definition be allied to republicanism, had been much reduced in recent times (Evason, 1991: 11). Evason describes the historical foundation of women's voluntary action as rooted in housing and anti-poverty campaigns at the local level, grounded in issues that can be seen as the 'legitimate' concern of women. The commonality of such experiences to both Protestant and Catholic working-class women and subsequent recourse to action allowed women to question the divisive myths cultivated by politicians and 'discover' life for women in the other community (ibid: 49).

This growing sense of mutual awareness translated into such organisations as WSN and Women's Information Group, demonstrating that bridging links between Protestant and Catholic women were being formed during the Troubles based on shared concerns as women, and there were therefore clear instances in the decade or more prior to the Peace Agreement of women's cross-community gender advocacy activity and an increasing trend towards cooperation and the recognition of shared experiences as women. This is supported by feminist theory of conflict; as Chapter 2 argued, feminist scholars have asserted that empowering forms of mobilisation can be triggered during conflict, enabling women's movements to gain collective strength and cross ethnic or other divides.

However, whilst the vital grassroots support role undertaken by women's groups did precipitate a growth in a shared understanding of themselves as a movement, they



nevertheless found themselves (or sought to position themselves) outside the formal political system. The politics of Northern Ireland has been described as leaving little scope for a gendered citizenship view (Wilford, 1996: 41). As a DUP councillor explained, 'women bring in the more relevant everyday problems – the lack of pre-school places, tampering with education...but these issues take a backseat to security and the governance of Northern Ireland... [some issues] don't get the attention they merit' (in Wilford, Miller, Bell and Donoghue, 1993: 349). Thus, the politics practised and interests represented through engagement in women's groups were not deemed sufficiently urgent to grant these activists a political voice through formal policy-making channels, and such was the power of this devaluation that women themselves largely did not seek these channels, nor did they conceptualise their struggle to meet the needs of women in local communities as legitimate political interests which they could represent at the administrative, policy-making level. The strength of the public-private divide, combined with a security discourse that devalued the expertise and interests of the 'domestic' community, therefore cast women's struggles for social justice to the margins of political activity (Pedwell, 2008: 19).

### **3. The politicisation of the women's movement: the road to the Peace Talks**

A highly gendered narrative therefore dominated the political arena, which reinforced the location of women in a domestically-framed informal and voluntary sector, whilst simultaneously dismissing this work as irrelevant to the 'real politics' of the constitutional question and security. Nevertheless, those active in the nascent women's movement engaged with this narrative to attempt to mitigate their under-representation and seek political influence. Female activists' voluntary work had a distinctly political tone, and one may argue that this change in the 'self-identity' of the movement emerged from the growing impetus towards peace from the mid-1990s. Despite not being separate from the 'big issues' of peace and security, prior to 1998 women did not feature in the power structure of peace talks. As is true in other regions of conflict, women often prepare the ground for peace, but are neither present nor acknowledged at the agreements (Riordan, 2000: 66). However, the singular opportunity of the Peace Talks mobilised women to bring into focus the political dimension of their activism, from a belief that they had a fundamental contribution to make to the discussions about Northern Ireland's future (Hope, 2006).

This was not an instantaneous re-identification, but rather the result of a process of transition which saw the conversion of nascent bridging social capital into political engagement. The practice of small 'p' politics and the belief that women's involvement was political in this sense had been present in the work of forerunner organisations to the NIWC, such as NIWEP, and during the Opsahl Commission. NIWEP was established in 1988 to provide a platform through which women could express their concerns and help shape and develop social, economic and political policies at a local, national, European and international level (NIWEP, 2008: 1). It is therefore focused on fostering discussion and debate within Northern Ireland, and placing the country in discussions at the international level. Women had also participated in the Opsahl Commission of 1992-1993, an independent citizens' inquiry into ways for Northern Ireland to move forward (Lister, 1998: 226). According to Ann Hope, women responded to the Commission's call for input with a 'deluge' of submissions, attributing their lack of power to the absence of debate around everyday policy issues that had been deprioritised by politicians; issues in which they, their women's group or local group were

actively engaged, whilst being simultaneously alienated by politicians' concentration on the politics of the constitutional position (Hope, 2006: 4).

This process led citizens, and women in particular, to have greater confidence in putting their views forward and engaging with the political process. Through women's involvement in these movements and the shared vision and methodology which they encouraged, there was a gradual transformation in identity, which fed into and energised the NIWC (in conversation with Bronagh Hinds, WNC Commissioners' Meeting: 15 October 2008). Moreover, these women came to see themselves as part of a wider international community, engaged in a dialogue about women's rights and interests: through participation in global events such as the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference of Women in Beijing, they recognised the parallels between the experiences of women in Northern Ireland and women elsewhere in the world: 'Women have led peace movements...successfully networked across the religious and political divide. In doing this women have not seen themselves as pacifiers, but as agents for change' (Hinds in Wilford et al, 1993: 110-111). Cowell-Meyers notes that participation in the Beijing process mobilised women and created new expectations for collective action and pressure to be placed on formal institutions (2014: 68).

There were therefore instances in which bridging social capital began to develop and flourish, both in Northern Ireland as women worked across the sectarian divide for collective aims as women, and at the level of the international women's movement, as leaders from the Northern Ireland movement forged ties with women's movements from and with whom they had knowledge and practices to learn and share. Women took the initiative at the local level and across the ethnonational divide to create an alternative form of political citizenship in a society where formal politics had atrophied, developing productive kinds of leadership and giving these activists high esteem within their own communities (McWilliams, 1995: 33). The engagement with international networks and its impact on the women's movement and the movement's relationship with the UK and Northern Ireland governments will be analysed at length in Chapter 6, showing that the movement has a notably high level of engagement with the international gender equality arena, facilitating bridging ties by providing a shared set of norms and goals around which women's organisations can rally, and establishing linking ties with institutional actors like the UN and EU as policy arenas with which to by-pass and exert influence over the domestic level.

The gradual politicisation of those active in women's centres and grassroots support organisations, which feminist theorists (see Lister: 1997 and 2011 above) of citizenship have shown to be a process often seen in women's civil society activism, contributed to the growth of conferences and seminars at which they discussed their common experiences as women in a conflict society. A notable outcome of this politicisation was a conference in 1991 involving more than 400 women active in local organising. The conference, 'demonstrated a willingness on the part of these women, given the right circumstances, to examine and address political issues together' (Rooney, 1995: 45). Despite widely different political origins and loyalties, by focusing on their shared experiences of poverty and marginalisation, women active in grassroots activism were able to create common ground for activity across the ethnonational divide and so establish 'practical alliances' that helped to break down mistrust; namely, the bonding social capital present on either side of the sectarian divide (Hope, 2006). As such, 'feminists, and the wider women's movement of community-based groups and political activists, have gained hard-won experience about tactical alliances and about the limitations and possibilities of avoidance of political division as a strategy' (Rooney, 1995: 47).

The 1980s into the 1990s have therefore been characterised as a period of self-conscious effort on the part of women's groups, whether grassroots service provision groups or policy- and training-oriented organisations, to bridge the ethnonational divide and work collaboratively. As the peace process took shape in the mid-1990s and women within these practical alliances expressed concern about their political exclusion from its development, they came increasingly to develop a sense of common cause as women (Hope, 2006: 4). The mid-1990s saw the building of strong bonds of respect and friendship across the political, religious and class divides that have endured to this day (ibid: 5). However, in 1991 Evason judged that the movement resembled a wheel, with spokes and a rim but no centre, characterised by semi-detached feminists. For the 1990s, she called for a core to revitalise feminist debate and activity, to promote cooperation and mutual respect between all women (Evason, 1991: 57). Hope's reflection suggests that shared effort amongst women from the 1970s flowered in the mid-1990s. However, Roulston's judgement that the women's movement, albeit identifiable, was amorphous and lacking in common purpose (Roulston, 1997: 64), indicates that Evason's call for a movement centre was not yet established in the mid-to-late 1990s. Section 4 will therefore explore whether the Women's Coalition provided the 'centre' of the women's movement 'wheel', acting as a catalyst for a more defined coalescence of hitherto disparate women's group activity; namely, seeing a more formal expression of the transversal politics described in Chapter 2.

Nevertheless, during the Troubles and in the lead up to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the women's movement was increasingly working together and developing a sense of unity based on shared experiences and goals (in so far as unified is understood with Yuval-Davis's concept of transversal politics; namely, an approach in which emphasis is placed upon dialogue and coalition politics and differences encompassed with equal respect and recognition of each participant (Yuval-Davis, 1999) ), in order to lobby for certain policy outcomes – that is, growing bridging social capital was being converted into sustained political engagement.

#### **4. Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and women in elected politics**

This chapter has thus far reviewed pre-Peace Agreement developments and scholarly analysis to demonstrate that there were a range of factors impacting upon a women's movement that was working towards establishing the grounds for collective action. In June 1995, a major conference was facilitated by the University of Ulster Centre for Research on Women entitled *Women, Politics and the Ways Forward*; focused on getting women into decision-making arenas. It proposed a new political structure and the need for a clear strategy to support and develop women's participation, including, 'specific mechanisms for women to become involved in constitutional talks' (Hope, 2006: 7-8). This growing political consciousness and organisation meant that with the call for the establishment of Peace Talks, the women's movement was in a position to challenge collectively the exclusion of women and women's interests from the negotiations. In January 1996, the UK government proposed an election to a forum as a means of enabling political parties to enter into talks, and the women's movement recognised the opportunity for input.

Their response was the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which this thesis argues represented an attempt by the women's movement to capitalise upon the moment of political renewal to attempt to replicate the movement's bridging ties at the formal political level, in order to gender democracy. The Women's Coalition formed to ensure both that women would

have an input into the new constitutional arrangement, and that the entrenched pattern of ethnonational politics would be tempered by compromise, understanding and accommodation (Hinds and Nolan-Haley, 2003: 388). The NIWC's establishment was the result of a vibrant political dialogue that had developed through decades of women's political engagement at the local level, in which women's vital role in small 'p' politics, sustaining their communities, was amplified in order to seek to influence 'Politics' on the national stage (described in Hinds, 1999). The Women's Coalition should therefore be understood neither as an isolated movement, nor as the political home of a small minority of women. It was also fundamentally shaped by the individual agency of embedded leaders in the women's movement who possessed a central role in converting social capital into strategic action for social change that was, 'determined endogenously by collective mechanisms of social mobilisation and political debate'; namely, the wider women's movement (Christoforou, 2011: 86).

The University of Ulster conference in June 1995 generated a sense of purpose and was soon followed by the announcement of all-party talks in February 1996, creating a decisive moment in which real action could be possible. This was translated into a proposed course of action by Monica McWilliams, then a senior lecturer at the University of Ulster and one of the organisers of the conference, and Avila Kilmurray, director of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust who had been the first coordinator of the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation. McWilliams presented the idea of an all-woman intervention into the political process to the NIWEP management committee (of which she was a member), and they agreed to explore it through a further meeting (Fearon, 1999: 4-5).

In forming a set of principles and goals as the foundation of NIWC policy, the Women's Coalition drew heavily upon a NIWEP document, *Genderproofing the Election System and Talks Fora*, submitted in response to the Government's call for advice. Its themes covered equality of opportunity, treatment and outcome in political structures and substance, as outcomes which could only be achieved with the meaningful participation of women (Fearon and McWilliams, 1998: 1254). Moreover, Fearon and McWilliams locate this document within, and emerging from, networks established by women within and across ethnonational communities through women's centres, which had diversified to provide workplace and political training and developed into interlocutors with government in their search for funding. Women had become skilled negotiators, involving themselves increasingly in informal politics (ibid: 1225). McDonough notes that many living in urban, working-class ghettos took on the local pressures of welfare rights, exclusion, poverty and sectarianism, with women acting as the mainstay of such activities, both in neighbourhood associations and in exclusively female arenas. In the latter, McDonough describes a framework in which there is considerable user participation in management and decision-making and a disdain for formalised hierarchies (in Fearon, 1996: 26 and 29).

A conference was held on 17 April 1996 and convened by NIWEP, with the attendance of over 100 activists who had responded to an invitation letter signed by a further five founding members in addition to McWilliams and Kilmurray: Bronagh Hinds, who had been the first female president of Queen's University Belfast students' union and was subsequently heavily involved with the women's voluntary movement and in higher education; May Blood, from a working-class Protestant background and a long-standing community activist, who had followed a route to political involvement through years spent working in the Blackstaff mill and involvement in trade unionism (Fearon, 1999: 40 and 43-44); Margaret Logue, head of the Derry Women's Centre; Kathleen Feenan of the Women's Information Group; and Kate Fearon,

a recent president of the Queen's University Student Union and subsequently assistant director of a Belfast political think tank (Rynder, 2002: 46).

NIWEP sought consensus on translating this foundation of experience into formal political intervention. The continuing near-invisibility of women and women's issues proved decisive for the women assembled: those who had negotiated grassroots politics for many years would ensure themselves that women's voices were heard in the peace talks and beyond (Fearon, 1999: 9). The outcome of this conference was that, 'uniquely in the history of Irish or British politics, they constituted a cross-community group of women that intervened in the previously male-dominated process by contesting the election for delegates to the Talks as an all-women's coalition, the NIWC' (Fearon and McWilliams, 1998: 1257). The decision to have a cross-community base was deliberate and at the core of their founding philosophy, which centred upon an 'ethical framework' of inclusion, equality and human rights (ibid).

The Women's Coalition prepared an election platform and selection criteria for candidates, the former consisting of support for the principle and practice of gender equality; support for high quality, affordable and accessible childcare; support for forms of economic development that seek to reconcile family responsibilities; willingness to negotiate a political accommodation, and willingness to secure an agreement with the involvement of all interests and parties (Hope, 2006: 11-12). The call for candidates resulted in a slate of seventy, the fifth largest of any party, contradicting the established orthodoxy that women were not prepared to stand for election (Fearon, 1999: 12) and significant given the paucity of female candidates fielded by other parties, with the highest next percentage belonging to the SDLP with thirteen, whilst the UUP had just 1 per cent (ibid: 13). Of these seventy, ten also stood on the regional list; five were Protestants and five Catholic. A survey of all NIWC candidates showed that 45 per cent were Catholics and 28 per cent Protestant, however they were more likely to demonstrate no clear voting patterns, exhibiting instead an 'almost hyper-active' activity in the community and voluntary spheres (ibid: 23).

'[F]rom the outset they operated in a determinedly collective manner: their strength was their solidarity...They would not have a leader – they decided things collectively and democratically' (Mowlam, 2002: 146). This reflection by Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1997-1999, reveals something of the fundamental philosophy driving the Women's Coalition. They endeavoured to avoid "stunted 'group-think'" in order to preserve the heterogeneity and diversity which came from a membership of women active in the voluntary sector (Fearon, 2000: 153). The creativity inherent in the women's movement, rooted in a diverse membership operating on limited resources and marginalisation from the mainstream, meant that the unprecedented fielding of a large number of women candidates was made possible by deploying a variety of means: encouragement, training, reaching women through existing networks and activism, and providing childcare for meetings; all of which was accomplished within six weeks (Hope, 2006: 12). When the final vote was counted, the NIWC had secured 7731 votes, entitling it to send two regional delegates to the multi-party talks, Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar. The Coalition was able to marshal support amongst the electorate based on the belief that there should be more women in elected politics; a belief that rested largely on a commitment to fairness and justice, rather than the idea that only women can represent women (Fearon, 1996: 54).

McWilliams and Sagar were placed as one and two on the Party's list, reflecting the breadth of the Northern Ireland women's movement and the NIWC's commitment to bipartisanship. The former came from a Catholic background, and at the time was a senior

lecturer at the University of Ulster, as well as serving on several public committees and involvement with the establishment of a number of women's and equality organisations. Sagar, meanwhile, came from the Protestant community and had been involved in grassroots-based initiatives for many years, including sitting on the management committee of the Women's Information Group (Fearon, 1999: 22). Crucially, the circumstances and backgrounds of both McWilliams and Sagar were not exceptional in the wider group of 70 candidates, coming as they did in comparable numbers from both Protestant and Catholic communities, from business, community work, trade unionism, education and other sectors.

Therefore, the ninth place finish of the NIWC at the Forum peace talks' election on 30 May 1996 enabled it to lobby for the representation of local interests in the discussions. Bronagh Hinds assembled a 'Talks team' of seven women with a diversity of backgrounds and expertise. This included Jane Wilde, a doctor from a professional Protestant upbringing who coordinated the NIWC talks at the Forum; Diane Greer, founder of the Rape and Incest line and Women's Centre in Derry whose former support for loyalist paramilitarism allowed her to build bridges between loyalist parties in the Peace Talks and the NIWC; and Felicity Huston, a former Tory activist who contributed a more conservative voice to the group (Ryder, 2002: 48-49). By the time that the NIWC held its first Party conference in November 1998, the Coalition had more than 400 members, 40 per cent of whom were men. The delegates adopted a constitution and elected McWilliams as party leader (ibid: 55).

Central to the NIWC approach during the Talks and subsequent elections to Stormont was the need for a revitalised democracy which would increase the participation of those who had not found a role in the politics of the past (NIWC, 1998). One may observe in this political philosophy the politicisation of domestic space writ large; the NIWC took the experience acquired from grassroots political engagement, framed within a discourse of the domestic and private, and sought to inscribe its key objectives into the heart of the post-peace settlement political establishment, to ensure that a new politics would represent all citizens. The NIWC's engagement with the narrative of domestic space, and their politicisation of issues like childcare and domestic violence which were rhetorically placed within its remit, was therefore a means of ensuring that women were included in the political settlement of peace.

The NIWC's knowledge, skills and enthusiasm was organised neither hierarchically, nor along rigid political lines; it set itself a pragmatic problem-solving approach rather than adherence to a strict ideological dogma (Fearon, 1999: 13). This represented transversal politics at work, in which similar, compatible values can cut across differences in positionings and identity and thus enable differentiated groups of women to form coalitions along shared goals and values (Yuval-Davis, 1999). As such, NIWC ideas proffered during the Talks sought to promote inclusion and participation, in order to embed lasting peace for all sections of society. Such proposals included the establishment of a Civic Forum to extend citizen involvement in politics, an inclusive electoral system to accommodate newer and smaller voices, the redress of victims' rights, women's full and equal participation in the political process and more specific issues such as recognising the role of mixed housing in reconciliation and the link between community development and social inclusion (Fearon and McWilliams, 1998: 1261).

Many of these ideas were an amalgam of international practice, whether from specific national experiences like that of South Africa, or from multinational examples like the 1996 UN Commission on the Status of Women (Fearon and McWilliams, 1998: 1262). Ryder has noted that the NIWC's policy documents and briefing papers drew in large measure from work done by the Northern Ireland NGO delegation to the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on

Women, whilst many of the Coalition's organisers had been active in women's NGOs since the early 1990s (Ryder, 2002: 47). This highlights the breadth of the NIWC's ideological foundation and experience base, rooted in a diverse women's movement which had drawn ideas and support from beyond the immediate domestic context.

Their rejection of political absolutism set the NIWC apart from sectarian-defined party politics. As Monica McWilliams noted, 'we're representatives of both communities – that confuses them, they don't like it, and it makes us the brunt of hatred, the brunt of venom' (Murtagh, 2008: 35). The absence of a fixed constitutional position allowed the NIWC to have a broader and more inclusive vision, and thus served to obviate women's alienation from traditional politics. This encouraged a willingness amongst women with little formal political experience to work towards the transformation and radicalisation of democracy, whilst also addressing the constitutional question. This worked to challenge old behaviours and language as well as the sexism and sectarianism of politics. The NIWC viewed the vilification and demonisation of the political establishment as a barrier both to progress and political participation (Hinds, 1999: 125).

The Women's Coalition therefore sought to combine party politics with the unique transversal politics of the women's movement's grassroots activism. This meant capitalising upon a dense network of locally-based skills and knowledge, and ensuring that the new dynamic of an organisation founded upon cross-community cooperation translated into a participative politics (Dobrowolsky, 2003: 132). As such, in terms of principles and ambition, the party's remit went beyond what was often derisively referred to by their political peers as 'women's issues.' Whilst redressing the heavy imbalance of male to female political representation was certainly paramount, the NIWC expressed an encompassing political philosophy to address the disconnection between politicians and the lives of everyone in the community (Fearon, 1999: 18). Much of their focus was directed at securing conditions of equality for women, whilst further endeavouring to transform the adversarial political mould to ensure the integrity and stability of peace; informed by a language and behaviour of compromise, and a focus on reintegrating victims as those most marginalised from society by the conflict.

The Women's Coalition sought to address the perception that the political incumbents spent their time arguing and point-scoring, but did little in reality for people on the ground (Fearon, 1999: 75). It was therefore a large-scale political education project, in which relative political novices learnt quickly how the system worked, and simultaneously determined how they would operate differently to ensure that they could speak on behalf of the under-represented in society. This commitment to represent those who had been silenced thus far was informed by the NIWC's origins in the voluntary sector and women's movement; they were conscious of the marginalisation of the needs and opinions of people, particularly women, at the local level, whose concerns lay with childcare, education and other social services which had been largely obscured by the overwhelming focus upon the constitutional question. As McWilliams later noted, many women felt 'politically homeless' due to the alienating hyper-masculinised confrontational style of politics (European Database: date unknown).

In this way, the party challenged the predominantly male and masculinised political establishment, in which legitimate political representatives were those who could claim an authority on issues of security and the constitutional question and the experience of the NIWC at the grassroots level did not qualify them to sit at the negotiating table. The ensuing discomfort of disrupted gender norms which the NIWC presence generated led many male

politicians to seek means of undermining, 'the whingers...attempting to represent NI women'; often choosing sexualisation, a method which was at times also extended to Mo Mowlam (Fearon, 1999: 67). The entrenched gender stereotypes meant that NIWC women were told to 'breed for Ulster' rather than engage in politics, and Monica McWilliams was 'mooed' at by Ian Paisley Jr (Hinds, 2008: 2).

The NIWC's proposed policies reflected their determination to represent women's locally-based interests and were framed within a language which tied women's primary interests to the private and the domestic. This stemmed from the belief that women's needs and interests at the local level were as political in nature as security or constitutional matters, and should be accommodated by policy-makers. Therefore, suggested policies included a dedicated Minister for Children and Families, because, 'the work of raising children benefits the whole of society. That work must be recognised, valued and supported through government policies and programmes.' The NIWC also advocated redirecting resources towards ending violence against women and children, prioritising women's needs for housing and social services, and rectifying the 'woeful' lack of publicly-funded childcare, the lowest rate of provision in Europe. In line with their commitment to representing silenced groups, the NIWC argued for the need to ensure a detailed recognition of the rights and needs of victims (NIWC, 1998). The legacy of the Women's Coalition will be explored below, however in its organisation and practices it is possible to discern the development over time in the women's movement of transversal politics, as women's groups negotiated differences and developed goals upon which they could collectively agree.

This chapter thus far has sought to situate the development of the women's movement in the wider context of political and social change during the Troubles. A literature review has shown this period as one in which women's activism accelerated rapidly to meet local needs in the absence of sufficient state provision, with the growth in number of groups run by and for women pointing to the development of an identifiable women's movement, and that efforts to build ties across ethnonational divisions and create umbrella structures and networks were being undertaken on a number of fronts. McWilliams' characterisation attests to the complex and non-linear nature of this journey over the 1970s and 1980s, however, as women's groups disagreed over the main causes of women's oppression, with feminist, socialist and nationalist concerns creating fault lines (McWilliams, 1995: 26). Moreover, as Roulston has argued, by the 1990s the women's movement was still struggling to negotiate the obstacles to cooperation that came with the realities of the Protestant-Catholic binary, although such differences were being openly discussed in new forums (Roulston, 1997: 62).

The Women's Coalition was determined to use the opportunity offered by the 1998 moment to give women a political voice, and more broadly, to introduce a new set of political priorities and norms. NIWC prompting was crucial to ensuring that an equality framework was written into the Peace Agreement (Donaghy, 2003: 5). In a society and political system in which the equality discourse has largely concerned Catholic-Protestant parity, the Agreement ensured that gender entered the political language and legislative framework of equality. However, the main parties post-devolution have demonstrated, 'no initiative or interest in gender equality issues and structural designs did not prioritise incorporating gender considerations' (Donaghy, 2004: 26). A rhetorical commitment to gender equality has not translated into numerical parity in the Assembly and other public body representation. Indeed, the persistently low level of female representation suggests a formal political arena which continues to resist integrating a gender equality perspective. It took bold initiatives like the NIWC to inject gender issues. Such



examples mark the powerful and lasting impact of the Coalition, which have endured despite its decision to disband in 2006. The following chapter will look in detail at scholarly analyses of the Women's Coalition's electoral failure, which largely fall into structural and cultural explanations.

As stated above, the appearance of the Women's Coalition at the Forum talks and during the subsequent elections galvanised other parties to make women more visible. However, any electoral gains from this action have been slow to arrive and tenuously held. In the 52-seat Stormont Parliament, which was dissolved when Westminster re-imposed Direct Rule in 1972, women were never more than four per cent of the candidates in elections. Moreover, there were never more than four women returned at any one of the dozen Stormont elections, and only one woman, Dehra Parker, achieved ministerial office, from 1949-1957 (Hillyard et al, 2006: 14). There has been little improvement since the 1998 Agreement. In the 2003 and 2007 Assembly elections, only 17 per cent of MLAs were women, 18 out of 108 total seats (OFMDFM, 2006b: 3). At the 2011 elections, 20 women were returned (18.5 per cent).

This pattern of under-representation extends to the local political level and public appointments. In 2005, 21.5 per cent of women in local councils were women (Hillyard et al, 2006: 21), growing to 24 per cent by 2013 (Galligan, 2013: 416). There were five women chief executives of the 26 District Councils by 2011 (ibid); 85 per cent of the members of the bench and 74 per cent of the Bar Association were men in 2005, and there were no female high court judges. Further, despite occupying over 54 per cent of all non-industrial staff in the Civil Service in 2002, women only had 16 per cent of senior posts. Prior to the 2010 General Election, Northern Ireland had only had three female MPs sit at Westminster since partition (Breitenbach and Galligan, 2004: 65 and Hillyard et al, 2006: 45). There are currently four women elected to the House of Commons representing constituencies in Northern Ireland, out of a total of eighteen.

For those women who do serve in political parties and as elected members, very few have represented any party in major initiatives such as inter-party negotiations over the country's constitutional future. Further, they have rarely been active in discussions with the British government or Northern Irish government departments, and almost none have acted as media spokespersons (Morgan and Fraser in Dunn, 1995: 86). The legacy of a masculinised politics has therefore imprinted resilient gendered habits of elected representation. The development of social capital in the women's movement appears then to have not translated into a numerical breakthrough for women in elected politics. As Lowndes argues, women often cross the boundary between community activity and political action in pursuit of particular causes, yet having got there are less likely than men to progress up the ladder. She suggests that women are not 'spending' their social capital in the formal political arena (Lowndes, 2004: 58). This supports the hypothesis outlined above, that the NIWC were not able to 'spend' their bridging social capital in the political sphere; exploring the movement's strategic re-direction in response to the electoral failure of the women's movement as political party is a critical aim of this study.

Hinds has described the ultimately divided nature of the Assembly along sectarian lines, which both works against women MLAs collaborating across party lines and extends to women's movement work with women politicians: women's organisations, 'find their work frustrated by having to hold back on campaigns and avoiding or turning down offers from female MLAs on one side until the other side engages in case they are accused of being

sectarian' (Hinds, 2008: 12). A women's movement with high levels of bridging social capital nevertheless encounters the detrimental consequences of a sectarian political system in its daily work. It may be that entrenched political ethnonationalism has an impact on the ability of the women's movement to establish linking social capital with politicians and policy-makers, with the movement undertaking specific measures to mitigate the effects of this, such as seeking to establish linking ties with female politicians.

## **5. The context of a developing government social capital agenda**

The development of the women's movement coincided with a number of other political and public policy trends which undermined the dominance of masculinised ethnonational politics and impacted upon the developing women's movement's conversion of social capital into political engagement; namely, the increasing prioritisation of community relations as a policy objective for government. This established a political philosophy influencing policy-making to which the women's movement had to adapt. Policy-makers recognised the applicability of social capital theory to the Northern Ireland context: that interaction enables people to build communities and mutual trust. A sense of belonging and the positive experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust and tolerance that can be involved) can, it is argued, bring benefits such as reduced crime, better health, higher educational achievement and better economic achievement (Hughes and McCandless, 2006: 166). The Government's social capital agenda will be explored at length in Chapter 5; this chapter will outline in brief the development of the agenda in order to understand the policy context both in which the women's movement was developing, and which framed its strategic re-alignment after the Peace Agreement and electoral failure of the Women's Coalition.

The Northern Ireland government responded with ambivalence towards the voluntary sector in the pre-Agreement period. In the late 1960s, the British government established the Community Relations Commission to ameliorate ethnonational relations and create a pool of activists to connect across the divide (McCartney, 1999: 44). The Commission supported the flowering of local activism, however the briefly re-constituted Northern Ireland Assembly in 1974 closed the organisation, arguing that it was no longer necessary with the re-instatement of a representative Assembly (ibid: 46). At the local government level, which had funding responsibility for services in their area, many elected representatives were wary of encouraging local voluntary groups, and saw their existence as a usurpation of the role of local government (Birrell and Williamson, 2001: 207). However, the 1990s saw a period of more sustained growth, with the establishment of a number of intermediary bodies, including the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust and the Community Relations Council (CRC).

The political institutionalisation of community relations can be seen in the establishment of the CRC in 1990, to promote better community relations and the advanced acknowledgement of cultural diversity. The CRC provided grants, training, information and advice to assist with and encourage mutual understanding and respect; and aimed to increase understanding and co-operation between political, religious and cultural communities. In practice, though, community relations work has become synonymous with cross-community relations (Heenan, 1997: 89). Alongside the work of intermediary agencies, in 1993 a new era in government's relations with the third sector was marked by the publication of its *Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary Sector and of Community Development*, marking a radical break with earlier policies toward the voluntary sector. The Strategy committed government to working in partnership with and supporting the voluntary sector. It declared that one of the

strategic aims of all government departments was, 'to encourage, promote and support an independent, vigorous and cost effective voluntary sector in Northern Ireland' (Birrell and Williamson, 2001: 201).

The Strategy came within a wider British context over the late 1970s to the 1990s of a change in the character of the voluntary-statutory relationship led from the centre, with a push to instate systems organised on market principles and oriented towards 'consumers' in the name of 'choice' and 'efficiency.' Government consciously sought to promote the role of the voluntary sector as an alternative to state provision (Lewis, 1999: 260-261), whilst the new public management agenda introduced a range of market and contractual mechanisms to govern relationships between local government and its voluntary sector partners, with the latter restricted to that of service agent (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2002: 56). From 1997, a commitment to partnership with the voluntary sector was framed within a policy structure that sought both partnership in the delivery of public services, as well as voluntary sector involvement in the design of the public policy space for public services (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2004: 574). The compact published in 1998 referenced the voluntary *and community* sector and its relations with government, reflecting New Labour's attraction to communitarian thinking, with its emphasis on civil society and a healthy voluntary sector (Lewis, 1999: 265).

There was therefore a generalised UK political trend towards bringing the voluntary sector into the shaping and delivery of public policy, with the new arrangement seeing, 'civil society as a resource for the state, a reserve army of potential' (Morison, 2000: 112), with government, 'seeking to operationalise a particular, ultimately more managerially driven programme by influencing, allying with, and co-opting the voluntary sector as a resource that they do not directly control' (ibid: 131). The influence of Giddens and Third Way ideology gave state backing to a practice of fostering an active civil society (Meehan, 2003: 8). However, as Lewis cautions: 'There remains the issue of how far the voluntary sector is being harnessed to New Labour's project "for itself," and how far it is still a matter of it serving government's ends' (Lewis, 1999: 265). For the women's movement, as Meehan argues, women's strong representation in the voluntary sector does not necessarily make it the case that women will experience more democracy through greater participation (Meehan, 2003: 11), particularly if their skills, knowledge and social capital is ultimately being co-opted with few returns.

The 2005 Good Relations Strategy emphasised that social capital is a particularly valuable social resource, and its availability is predictive of the social, economic and governmental success of a society. It has therefore provided the grounding for recent government policy towards the voluntary sector (Acheson, Williamson, Cairns and Stringer, 2006: 118). The preeminence of a social capital framework can be seen across a variety of departments. For instance, the Department for Social Development (DSD) has adopted a social capital framework as a mechanism to measure the added value of community and voluntary based activity. A 'toolkit' of indicators and outcome measures has been formulated that reflect the bonding, bridging and linking dimensions of social capital (DSD, 2006), and government has committed to the application of the indicators in any funding arrangements with voluntary and community organisations (Positive Steps) (Hughes and McCandless, 2006: 169). Therefore, a social capital agenda has brought to the fore debate about the value of voluntary action, such that the, 'distinction between bonding, bridging and linking social capital has provided a set of tools to begin addressing the extent to which organisational activities reach horizontally across the communal divide and vertically into the policy community' (Acheson et al, 2006: 122).

However, the conceptualisation of social capital within a community relations framework has proven limiting, by supporting an analysis that fails to consider the diverse relationships that people construct on the basis of identity criteria other than national/ethnic affiliation, 'an essentialist analytical framework that underplays the complexity of identity and the dimensions of the conflict not explainable by the Protestant/Catholic axis, seriously limits the possibilities of building social capital' (Hughes and McCandless, 2006: 165). The extent to which a social capital analysis has been applied at an institutional level to gender issues will be explored in the following chapters, and considered for its impact on women's movement efforts to establish linking ties and influence policy-making. The incorporation of gender into the Northern Ireland government's understanding of social capital could have positive implications for the levels of linking social capital between the women's movement and government, whereas its absence could signal the continued hegemony of the Protestant-Catholic community relations paradigm in policy-making.

The ubiquity of community relations, however, has meant that despite the, 'phenomenal contribution of local women's groups keeping hope alive within and between the divided communities of Northern Ireland' (Opsahl, 1993: 84), the top-down demand for voluntary work to be framed in a cross-community model has created definitional problems for women's groups, because the women's movement's methods of working, collaborating and communicating do not align easily with community relations vocabulary (Heenan, 1997: 92). Indeed, it could be argued that this evolution towards the dominance of the community relations model, 'threatens to remove this commitment to equality [in the Good Friday Agreement] and replace it with what is little more than the latest version of a tired and fraudulent pacification programme' (McVeigh, 2002: 57).

Subsequent chapters will analyse why community relations has developed such favour in the equality narrative, and the response of the women's movement to this agenda. In reference to the Women's Coalition, Murtagh points to a pragmatism in the women's movement, in the conscious choice to adjust the style and scale of political engagement and transcend the boundaries of the informal realm, rather than remain external to the process (Murtagh, 2008: 27). This pragmatic approach will be explored in relation to an institutional focus on community relations; namely, the extent to which the women's movement has adapted to meet the Government's political priorities and the implications for bridging and linking social capital.

Moreover, this study is interested in the ways in which the women's movement 'spends' its bridging and linking social capital to seek to gender democracy in Northern Ireland. Of note is therefore the extent to which a government focus on community relations disrupts the women's movement's goals in advocating for the rights and interests of women, in favour of an approach focused on building cross-community ties. Recent scholarship has conceptualised the work of women's organisations within this ethnonational paradigm (see Acheson et al, 2006: 73-77); the activity of women's organisations is judged according to its relative success at promoting cross-community contact. Whilst the benefits of breaking down ethnonational division through inter-community work is certainly an important facet of embedding good relations in a post-conflict society, such studies reflect the hegemony of the community relations doctrine and obscure alternative facets of the equality agenda which are the focus of the women's movement.

This reflects the prevailing undervaluing of women's contributions to peace-building and conflict resolution, as outlined in Chapter 2. For instance, Campbell et al note that very

high levels of bonding social capital can facilitate bridging social capital, based on a sense of security derived from membership in a safe and dependable intra-community network (Campbell et al, 2008: 30). Work by women's organisations in intra-community settings may therefore be overlooked in the wider community relations debate for the underlying benefits that strengthening bonding social capital amongst one group of women can in turn have on building linking social capital, and not least for improving that group's access to social, political and economic resources. The Government's rejection of this wider understanding of social capital can be seen in its resistance to implementing a Civic Forum, advocated for by the Women's Coalition (the idea came originally from a NIWEP paper) and enshrined in the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter; however in this context, it shows that the grounds for the post-NIWC women's movement's strategic change were already established in the mid-to-late 1990s. The government's resistance to supporting a consultative framework to bring civil society into policy-making in the form of the Civic Forum therefore formed part of a wider state narrative which resisted a wide-ranging, plural civil society dialogue in policy-making in favour of a narrower, ethnationally-demarcated community relations agenda.

This has been compounded by the influence of European funding. PEACE I was a self-consciously experimental programme which was agreed, negotiated and instituted during the period between the first paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 and the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998. A study of funding over the 1996-1997 period showed that thirty EU Structural Funds measures were delivered with a value of \$64.6 million, with \$44 million being provided to the sector through the EU's Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Birrell and Williamson, 2001: 212); with a 'cross-community' requirement sometimes built in as a criterion when projects are considered under Peace funding (Roulston and Davies, 2000: 11). During this period, voluntary and community activists were among the European Commission's most effective lobbyists and were participants in a policy community that by-passed both the largely powerless locally elected politicians and Westminster. As such, these organisations played a leading role in project delivery under the programme. PEACE I therefore embodied the view that social inclusion was central to achieving peace and reconciliation and that community-based organisations were especially able to deliver on this (Acheson and Milofsky, 2008: 72-73).

Women's groups embraced the opportunities provided by Peace funding in the pre-Agreement period, and internalised the lessons of engagement with Europe to facilitate bridging and linking social capital. Meehan argues that, 'women in Northern Ireland were quick to spot that they were good at being cross-community partners, and hence eligible to submit proposals for funding' (Meehan, 2000: 91). The author notes that the Women's Coalition self-consciously examined the workings of the EU Economic and Social Committee and institutions in other European countries (ibid). This suggests that the European level was a significant influence on the women's movement, something that will be further explored in Chapter 6 in the context of the post-Agreement period. Indeed, in so far as, 'the language and conventions of EU policy-making have helped to open up a space for contending parties to talk about solutions to old problems in a new way—and to act upon that' (ibid: 96), one can hypothesise that an internationally-networked women's movement in Northern Ireland was influenced profoundly by this arena and utilised its examples to develop their collective goals.

PEACE II departed from this ethos; it was formulated post-Agreement at a time when elected politicians in Northern Ireland were in a stronger position and wished to reclaim some

of the ground 'captured' by the voluntary sector. This is evident in the favour that PEACE II lent to macro-economic and political changes as the dominant peace-building strategy over alternative grassroots 'civil society' approaches. As such, privilege was given to economic and private sector actors and large third sector umbrella groups at the expense of local community organisations (O'Dowd and McCall, 2008: 89). The voluntary sector's access to funding and influence - based on a belief in their core role in peace and reconciliation - diminished due to their positioning in the minds of policy-makers as just another interest group (Acheson and Milofsky, 2008: 75). For the women's movement, the changing fortunes of the voluntary sector in general did not, one may argue, fundamentally alter the tenuous nature of their existence. Women's groups received only five per cent of funding from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation; directly contributing to a crisis of resources in the women's movement (Side, 2005: 322). The strictures of providing a community relations service neglect the ways in which women's groups have created distinctive, more participatory and inclusive methods of working based on the transversal politics of coalition. Uppermost is the expectation that neither community is homogenous; alliances and shared values may be achieved across this broad division (ibid).

However, acquiring funding has become closely tied to demonstrating a 'good relations' impact, which the women's movement continues in its efforts to resolve with the nature of their work. The ongoing threat to the sustainability of the women's movement posed by an insecure funding base has negative implications for bridging social capital in the women's movement. Competition for financial resources creates tensions between different organisations and reduces their ability to act collectively. Interviews with movement leaders for this study explore the implications of funding-related tensions, and the measures being taken to mitigate negative outcomes. Side has argued that the funding environment in Northern Ireland as a whole is inimical to the spirit and operational style of the women's movement. The multi-layered contexts of women's organising - within and across ethno-political communities, within Northern Ireland, cross-border with the Republic of Ireland, as part of the UK or of Europe, and beyond Europe - have proven confounding to efforts to acquire funding for projects. Side notes that requirements to maintain particular structures of fiscal and organisational accountability can lead to 'volunteer burn-out', with smaller groups particularly vulnerable (Side, 2006: 27). Subsequent chapters will analyse the implications for the women's movement's social capital of financial insecurity and the strictures placed on organisations in receipt of project funding; impacting on their ability to utilise bridging and linking ties to have policy influence due to competition for limited funding sources.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explore the development of the women's movement and situate that development in the wider context of political and social change. The exposition above of the development of the women's movement has sought to establish a context for the research questions set out in Chapter 1. A review of the existing literature has pointed to the development of bridging ties amongst women's organisations during the Troubles and in recent years since the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, and has also alluded to engagement with government community relations and equality agendas, as well as the strength of their relationship to international gender policy arenas. A reading of academic analysis about the Women's Coalition has established its critical role in the development of the women's

movement, and as such the NIWC can be understood as a catalytic moment, in which the opportunity of peace talks mobilised women's groups to formalise the links across religious and other divides that they had hitherto been developing.

A review of literature has allowed a picture to develop of this period as one in which women's movement organisation accelerated rapidly to meet local needs of in the absence of adequate engagement by the Government in social policy and welfare provision. Scholars have argued that the growth in number of women's groups, run by and for women, can be characterised as an identifiable women's movement and that efforts to build ties across ethnonational divisions and create umbrella structures and networks were being undertaken on a number of fronts. McWilliams' characterisation attests to the complex and non-linear nature of this journey over the 1970s and 1980s, however, as women's groups disagreed over the main causes of women's oppression, with feminist, socialist and nationalist concerns creating fault lines (McWilliams, 1995: 26).

Nevertheless, the foundations for the Women's Coalition were established in this period; the principle of transversality was beginning to take hold as women, whilst not dismissing their often deeply held ethnonationalist identities or political positions, sought to learn ways to work amid such differences and thus were establishing strong bridging ties. The Women's Coalition was therefore made possible by this process of learning to recognise embedded differences, and yet not allow them to create political division. The calling of Peace Talks created a moment of opportunity for political input for the women's movement and so accelerated this process of coalition-building. Fragmentation was still a feature of the movement, and it should not be concluded that the Women's Coalition represents the summit of a straight climb from division and disagreement to unity and consensus.

As Byrne argues: 'This process has not been "natural" or easy for women; it has been based, rather, on the conscious development of feminist praxis and a commitment to activism based on coalitions of differently situated women...Despite a lack of consensus and, at times, vacillating levels of tension...women in Northern Ireland, continue to organise and become politicised...based on a model of solidarity' (Byrne, 2009: 171). The following chapter will evaluate where the electoral defeat of the Women's Coalition left the women's movement and its model of solidarity. The failure of the Women's Coalition alongside the Government's new social capital agenda, as explored above by reviewing existing scholarship, formed the grounds upon which the women's movement was forced to rethink its own strategy and seek the development of linking ties. Chapter 4 will explore the movement's strategic re-direction, situating the new strategic course within social capital theory as the movement sought to establish linking ties, and highlighting the role of movement leaders – many of whom had been key figures in the Women's Coalition – in setting the agenda for change.

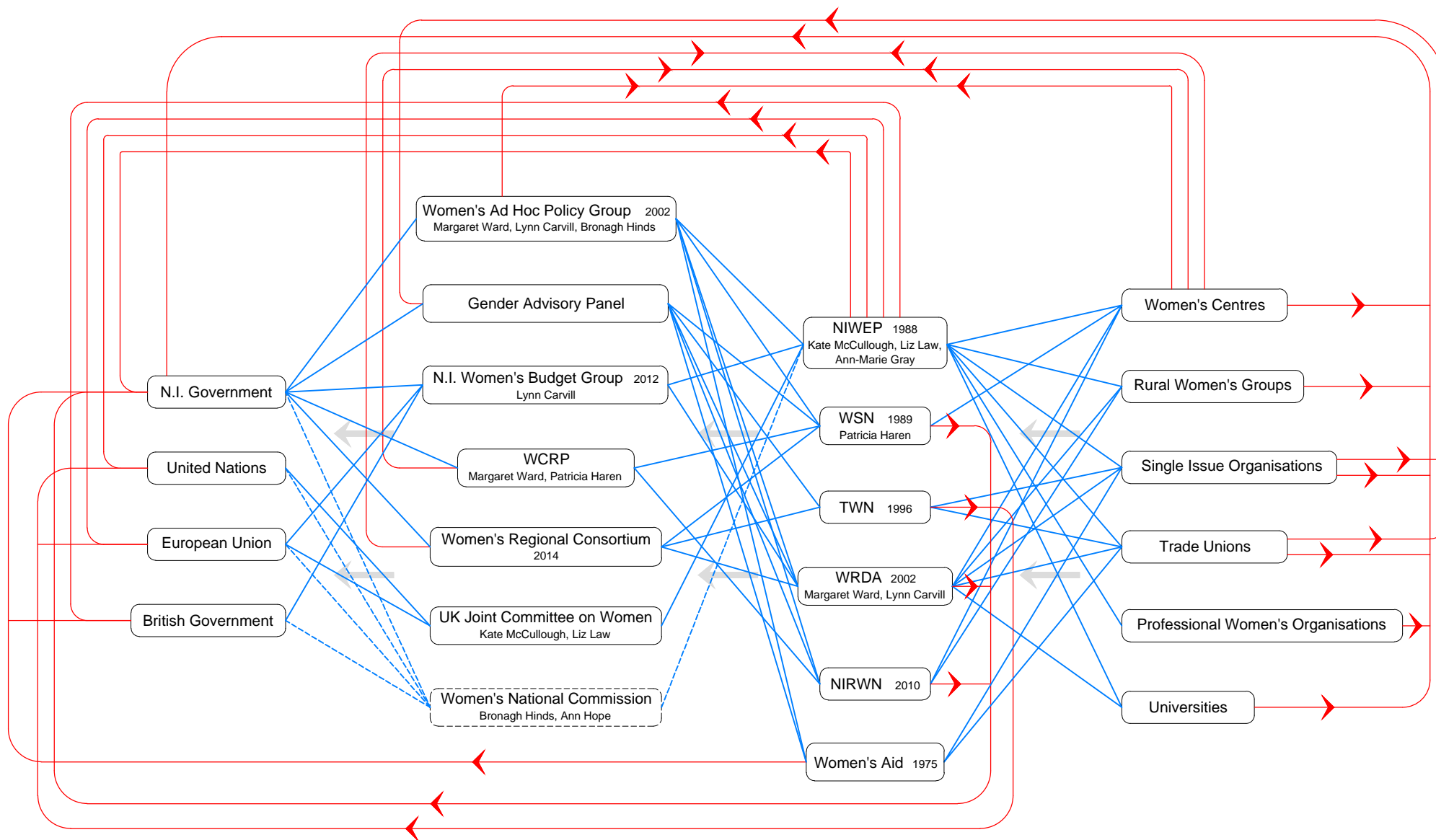


Figure 2

"Channels for influencing policy-making in Northern Ireland: The women's movement's bridging and linking social capital since the Belfast/Good Friday agreement."



## **Chapter 4**

### **The electoral failure of the Women's Coalition and the development of a new strategy**

#### **1. Introduction**

Chapter 3 charted the development of a coherent women's movement during the Troubles from a weak and fragmented constellation of groups into a robust and connected movement able to build on its strength to form a political party and enter the new post-Peace Agreement Northern Ireland Assembly. However, it showed that electoral failure, a return to dominance of politics along ethnonational lines, funding crises and a narrative of good relations placed the women's movement and its aims on uncertain ground. This chapter is concerned with the re-positioning of the women's movement in the aftermath of the Women's Coalition; it is not a new analysis of its failure, but rather is interested in critically evaluating where this failure took the women's movement in a post Belfast/Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland. It will set out scholars' explanations for the Women's Coalition's electoral failure, and interview evidence will be utilised to bolster academic analyses.

This chapter seeks to build on academic analysis of the Coalition's failure using interview evidence, and to conceptualise its aims and failure within a social capital frame. By embedding a political party, the women's movement sought to bypass linking social capital, however with failure it had to reassess and create new links to policy-makers by developing structures that do not seek to impose a unitary vision but rather promote flexibility and diversity. As such, social capital has much to reveal about these new links and structures. Moreover, the catalytic role of leadership agency in setting and re-formulating the strategic agenda of the women's movement will be considered. This study's contribution will lie in showing that the Coalition's failure sheds light on the re-positioning of the women's movement; characterised by a strategy which maintains a highly flexible network by facilitating the agency of leaders (and therefore creating a dependence on key individuals), whilst also recognising the need to establish linking ties.

#### **2. Scholarship**

The contribution of civil society to the peace process has been described as, 'indirect rather than direct, gradual rather than dramatic...the role of such organisations has been osmosis-like, and almost imperceptible in its effect' (Cochrane and Dunn: 1997 in Farrington, 2004: 1). The successes of the Women's Coalition in bringing women's political representation to the fore, however, and in widening the discussion and instruments of equality in Northern Ireland, demonstrates the women's movement's tangible contribution to the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. It emphasised a wider conception of politics, 'in which civil society acts as a control on the political process and also generates a new understanding of how public and private spheres relate', and generated a debate about how to develop political institutions that encourage civil society and pluralism (Ridden, 2001: 111-112). Moreover, it represented a powerful message about politics in a divided society, whereby the emphasis is placed on friendship that is chosen, and made in a society in which, 'the assumption [is] that allegiance flows automatically or "naturally" from certain forms of identity' (Whitaker, 2011: 64).

Nevertheless, the initial successes of the Coalition could not be maintained in the years immediately following the Peace Agreement and re-constitution of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Having succeeded in seeing two candidates elected to the newly-constituted Assembly, Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice, who had been a journalist before heading the European Commission office in Belfast from 1992-1997, the Party's share of the vote dropped from 1.6 per cent in 1998 to just 0.4 per cent in 2003 and the party officially disbanded in 2006.

Scholars have offered a number of explanations for this collapse, largely framed in structural and/or cultural terms. Cowell-Meyers argues that, 'a new, small and not particularly well organised party pressured the other parties in a system to shift their internal party practices and external party policy. The party's agenda was then co-opted by the other parties and its voice was drowned out in the context of increased polarisation that followed' (2011: 417). The author, who labels the Coalition a 'movement-party' (2014: 62), notes that the NIWC put gender politics on the map in Northern Ireland, and so was an effective example of the contagion process by which small, new and fringe parties may cause other parties to change their issue positions, including their representation of women. Cowell-Meyers asks whether the situation, with regards to women's representation, would have changed without the party's existence. She concludes that, 'the NIWC was formed *because the other parties were not advancing women's interests*. It would not have existed had the established parties been willing to make advances at the time the NIWC was created' (Cowell-Meyers, 2011: 416).

Cowell-Meyers argues that the women's movement chose to form a political party at this moment as a conscious undertaking to influence the established parties' behaviour, thereby exploiting the dynamics of the party political system and context of the Peace Talks to in essence *seek* the co-option of their gender equality agenda into the political mainstream, by looking to, 'blackmail the other parties into granting their own women access as candidates, representatives, and leaders. The conventional electoral success of the party was not their goal; instead, the pressure the party placed on the other parties increased women's descriptive representation...and also forced the other parties to change their approach to women's substantive representation'; thus increasing the system's democratic legitimacy (2014: 62-63). These parties learnt from the NIWC's example that women were electable in Northern Ireland, and feared that giving the impression that they did not support women within their own parties could cost them in electoral terms. Fearon supports this judgement: 'The NIWC put pressure on political parties to select women candidates and address women's issues' (Fearon, 1999: 37).

Alongside the increased numbers of women candidates and Ministers selected by the established parties, Cowell-Meyers points to the greater referencing of women's issues by other parties, with Sinn Féin, the SDLP, UUP and PUP referring to, for instance, the importance of gender mainstreaming and childcare (2011: 421). The author concludes that the Coalition bet that competitive behaviour on the established parties' part would help realise the NIWC's founding principle, and they therefore risked their own co-option (ibid: 428). As Monica McWilliams recalled, 'we never in our wildest dreams expected to get elected. We simply put ourselves out there to force the other parties to put some women at the table...we hadn't set out to get elected – we simply wanted the point to be noted that women needed to be included in negotiations' (McWilliams, 2010: 24). The inference, therefore, is that the aim was the dispersion and embedding of innovative policy ideas related to gender equality, rather than the longevity of the Women's Coalition itself.

Murtagh concludes that the extremes of Northern Irish politics and society came to assume majority status, reinforced by the consociational system. The author attributes the Coalition's dissolution to a failure to sustain its transition to formal politics, 'largely due to structural and cultural constraints engendered by the inimical discourses of nationalism, conflict and realism, and further reinforced by the consociational system.' The political picture in Northern Ireland came increasingly to be one dominated by the 'extremes', as Sinn Féin and the DUP took on majority status (Murtagh, 2008: 22 and 30). This was further entrenched through the Assembly's voting structures. Members were required to designate themselves as nationalist, unionist or other, as an effort to ensure cross-community consensus and effectively allowing a group veto to each community. The result was to push cross-community parties like the NIWC to the periphery of decision-making. She notes that, 'such marginalisation not only disempowered the NIWC in real terms but also in terms of public perception, harming its purported image as an effective agent for political change', by implicitly casting the 'others' as political lightweights with little real transformative or policy impact (ibid: 29). Similarly, Whitaker noted that the resilience of sectarian politics contrasted with the women's movement's transversal politics and focus on common issues, with the NIWC unable to mitigate sectarian affiliation and inspire a lasting change in the political dialogue. Whitaker argues that the party's recognition of the salience of multiple identities in Northern Ireland, embodied in the two NIWC MLAs' attempts to choose a designation in the Assembly that encompassed the complexity of Northern Irish identity, could not withstand the institutionalisation of the normative categories of identity in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (Whitaker, 2004: 177).

Murtagh asserts that political fragmentation also hampered NIWC efforts to create much-needed alliances, such as a cross-party women's caucus (Murtagh, 2008: 36). 'Defensive' voting followed, with voters opting for one of the four major parties amid a climate of perceived uncertainty and instability (ibid: 31). That is, the Women's Coalition was hampered by the ultimate dominance of the constitutional question and ethnonational party system, resulting in their inability to meaningfully embed in the party political system and secure re-election. Murtagh also highlights the strain of discursive realism in Northern Irish politics, an outcome of the conflict between two competing nationalist groups, which in turn exhibits as fundamentally gendered with the infusion of a masculine, martial discourse into the political realm and casts women as signifiers of national differences. The author argues that consociation embeds this realist, zero-sum interpretation, which fundamentally contradicts the Women's Coalition's transversal discourses (ibid: 32-33): 'The political discourses of Northern Ireland's divided society, embedded within the consociational system, inevitably inhibited the NIWC's political progress and endurance, rendering the movement's transition to formal politics a transient phenomenon' (ibid: 38). Whitaker also points to, in this sense, the cost of consociation, noting that in requiring support from large and unified nationalist and unionist blocs for its survival, the security of the Agreement's future was at odds with that of the Women's Coalition (Whitaker, 2008: 333).

Therefore, a political opportunity structure that legitimised ethnonational division proved inimical to the Coalition's attempts at political transformation. Moreover, the argument that structural factors facilitated and legitimised sectarian politics is also supported by Byrne, who suggests that electoral failure was attributable to the rise of sectarian-identified parties at the 'extremes.' She argues that, 'the reification of ethnonational identity politics, leading to the perpetuation of existing social and political power structures, produced an

exclusionary post-conflict political system of government' (Byrne, 2009: 110). This is reiterated by Galligan, who observes that, 'the politics of the conflict kind of caught them as a middle ground party and caught others and kind of squeezed the centre so they were squeezed out of politics' (Galligan, 2010). As such, it has been argued that the NIWC's defeat in the 2003 elections can be understood more as a reassertion of sectarian voting patterns than as a vote against women (Hillyard et al, 2006: 22). Moreover, Brown et al support Murtagh's argument that NIWC isolation from the main parties also meant that few cooperative initiatives developed with women in other parties (Brown, Donaghy, Mackay and Meehan, 2002: 78). Fionnuala ni Aolain points to the inherent gender disadvantages of the electoral system, arguing that in structural terms it tends to favour the larger parties: 'It arguably services the needs of the dominant political transitions in Northern Ireland over marginalised or emerging political groupings' (ni Aolain, 2003: 6).

Certainly, then, the NIWC did not succeed in establishing itself as a sustainable political party, both in the Assembly and in local councils, where only one Women's Coalition representative was elected and eventually lost her seat. However, it demonstrated the women's movement's ability to translate bridging social capital into collective political action. Some scholars have pointed to ideological explanations for the Women's Coalition's failure, emphasising to different degrees the Coalition's difficulty in reconciling its heterogeneous politics with the constitutional question. Little has argued that the NIWC adopted an essentialist position, in which whilst recognising their differences over constitutional issues, they chose to focus on matters where few differences existed, thereby failing to create a politics built upon true heterogeneity. For instance, he suggests that the Women's Coalition did not deal with security issues that particularly affect nationalist/republican women, failing to talk about differences in an open and honest way. Ultimately, 'in many respects the NIWC still remains constrained within the traditional parameters of Northern Irish political debate', an approach which, 'cannot override sectarianism or the political dominance of the constitutional question' (Little, 2002: 170).

The endurance of entrenched ideological 'extremes' therefore undermined the Coalition's attempts to obviate sectarian differences through a focus on consensual politics. As Horowitz argues, 'had a government of the moderate middle been envisaged, the Alliance party and the Women's Coalition would have had a larger part to play in the constitutional process. But this was to be explicitly an arrangement between the two communities...They engaged, in the view of the small parties, in 'a carve-up' ' (Horowitz, 2002: 208). The Women's Coalition could nevertheless not prevent the constitutional question from fundamentally influencing their political trajectory with the concerted return of 'tribal' voting. Zalewski observes that the parochialism, masculinism and sectarianism of Northern Irish politics made the electoral failure of the Coalition unsurprising, which in turn demonstrates the deep and violently gendered character of the liberal state that rendered such failure 'predictable' (Zalewski, 2006: 490). She argues that it was their liberal approach to politics that undermined the Women's Coalition; they drew deeply on notions of woman's feminised difference, espousing the rhetoric of 'woman's reason.'

That is, she asserts that the Women's Coalition founded itself upon the difference of women as a means by which to radically reformulate politics (Zalewski, 2006: 489). This is supported by Ashe, who concludes that the identity assumed by the Women's Coalition as one based on an ethic of care and associated with peace, 'must be read as an engagement that has the twin effect of supporting established models of female identity while at the same time

deploying that identity in the cause of women's advancement in the political sphere' (Ashe, 2006: 581). Zalewski nevertheless views this engagement with feminised identity as politically interventionist work, emphasising 'womanliness' and so exposing how state machineries and practices depend upon ideologies of gender/sex difference: 'In this way the Coalition's failure reveals the chimera of gender neutrality but also offers the potential for imagining different routes into thinking about how gender works' (2006: 492).

Further ideologically-based explanations have been offered for the Women's Coalition's failure, in which scholars characterise the NIWC as having neglected to adequately deal with the realities of sectarianism. Dobrowolsky predicted that, 'a major battle for the NIWC lies in keeping in touch with its social movement base and not being ground down by the formal political war (metaphorically and literally)' (Dobrowolsky, 2002: 318), the latter outcome being that attested to by scholars outlined above. She argues that contentious issues like abortion were side-stepped, and that attempting to build a common agenda in which to bury differences may bring limited gains (ibid: 326). Brown et al assert that it would be naive not to acknowledge that the legacy of violence and division left less space in which women can mobilise women as women, overshadowing attempts to get 'gender on the agenda' and embedding political parties' unwillingness to move the debate beyond constitutional issues (Brown et al, 2002: 80).

The NIWC's formation as a separate party, whilst reflecting a lack of initiative amongst other parties to promote female representation, nevertheless resulted in a situation in which it could be attacked. The authors contrast this with efforts in Scotland, in which a broad-based movement made it difficult for party members to criticise a campaign for women's representation without criticising colleagues (Brown et al, 2002: 80-81). In talking about the early days of the post-1998 Assembly, Hinds notes that developing a cross-party women's caucus comprising rank and file members was an up-hill struggle, in which despite the efforts of SDLP MLA Patricia Lewsley and Eileen Bell of Alliance to involve women from all parties in less formal ways, a women's network in the Assembly never developed (Hinds, 2008: 8). Galligan attributes this to the ultimate primacy of communal identity over gender identity in the Assembly, with unionist parties unwilling to participate (Galligan, 2006: 215). Attempts by the NIWC to create a new kind of politics therefore reflected an ambition that could not match the weight of historical and political resistance, to generate a contagion effect with members of other parties, notably women, and establish a pluralist coalition for women's representation that crossed party boundaries. This is echoed by Sales in her concluding remarks about the NIWC. Writing in the early stages of the Women's Coalition, she warns that, 'unless women are involved with politics as it is traditionally defined in Northern Ireland, their influence is likely to remain marginal' (Sales, 1997: 202). This points to a tension in Northern Irish politics, with attempts to practise a new kind of inclusive politics meeting the endurance of ethnonational division.

Scholars have therefore cautioned against viewing the Women's Coalition as a politically transformative turn, both for the political status quo in general, and for gender equality and women's representation in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, its innovation and willingness to talk openly during negotiations when other parties maintained political deadlock attracted significant media attention, giving invaluable on-the-job media training to activists. Moreover, during negotiations the Coalition were able to build on their links to the international gender equality agenda through recognition from Vital Voices, Hillary Clinton's global initiative to promote the advancement of women, which highlighted the NIWC's role

and exerted pressure on the other parties to raise the profile of women members (Cowell-Meyers, 2011: 424). The Women's Coalition maintained dialogue with all political groups, communicating across the constitutional divide and sensitising delegations to one another's issues (ibid: 415); a practice that the women's movement has continued. This chapter will explore how the women's movement, having sought to harness the vibrant activity of women's civil society organising in the formalised political arena, has endeavoured to re-formulate its position in the political landscape of Northern Ireland. This transition has not been dealt with extensively by scholars, yet it is crucial for understanding the emergence of linking ties to political institutions and the pivotal role played by movement leaders. That is, this thesis is interested in key moments of strategic change in the movement, where emphasis was deliberately placed on leadership of a highly-networked movement. As such, focus has been placed on interviews with key players (in 2011-2013).

### **3. Legacy of the NIWC and the women's movement in a post-Agreement Northern Ireland**

This section explores the manner in which leading members of the movement view the experience of the Coalition and the narrative(s) that they constructed in order to build upon its strengths rather than focus on its failures. It also analyses the nature and extent of these successes in a post-Agreement Northern Ireland; exploring the extent to which the Women's Coalition contributed to a new equality framework. This will facilitate an analysis of how the women's movement has re-strategised following the dissolution of the NIWC. The retrenchment into ethnonational and chauvinistic attitudes after the Peace settlement, as outlined by scholars above, was supported by Ann Hope. She noted that, 'we had the world coming in and praising the women's sector for the work it did; once the boys got into the Assembly, it was like, that was grand girls, you can go home now, we're you're elected representatives – not as crudely as that, but that's the way it rolled out. So the battles had to begin again in terms of representation' (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Monica McWilliams reiterated this point, noting that the party's initial success was firmly tied to a time-limited spirit of optimism that would not be sustained, thereby implying that failure was ultimately to be expected, 'there was absolutely no way that I saw myself as a permanent fixture in the Assembly. In fact, I knew in that election that we wouldn't get elected again, because the Assembly had collapsed and we had come in on the back of a very good high spirit of the Agreement...[by 2003] people's expectations had been burst so many times...people went and started voting back to tribal votes and the two extremes' (Interview: 26 November 2012). This denotes the endurance of a conventional political understanding that is confined, 'to debates about the rationality and logic of arguments put forward by the (tautologically presented) main protagonists and all other forms of politics or political antagonisms are either to be performatively discounted as irrelevant or tangential' (Zalewski, 2006: 485).

As such, it shows a resistance amongst the traditional power brokers to supporting the space opened by the Women's Coalition both for the greater political participation of women, and for a more encompassing social policy debate. This was the reason that Jane Wilde became involved in the Women's Coalition. She states that rather than being drawn to the NIWC for overtly feminist reasons, she was, 'totally fed up with the lack of women's voices in social policy. Politics wasn't really my kind of thing... [but] I was completely fed up of there not

being a woman at the table' (Interview: 22 June 2011). She noted that the NIWC sought to address this absence, 'it was created I think as a project; that was my interpretation, and I think that was a shared idea' (Interview, Jane Wilde: 22 June 2011). The return to more entrenched sectarian positioning as detailed by scholars therefore points to the possible devaluing once again of a rich social policy discussion in Northern Ireland, and the continuing primacy of ethnonationally-framed political debate.

Further evidence from interviewees supports Jane Wilde's comments and suggests that leading NIWC members viewed the party as an interventionist, time-limited measure. Monica McWilliams upheld the idea of the Women's Coalition as a 'project' linked to a particular moment and political opportunity: 'We never ever intended to get elected and, in many ways, we wanted to get out of there as quickly as we'd got in...We aimed to get more women into politics, and really it was a vanguard action to the other parties...But we knew we were never going to be a long-term option – nor did we want to be' (McWilliams, 2010: 27). This comment ties into Cowell-Meyers' judgement outlined above; that the Women's Coalition sought the cooption of their ideas by the established parties. McWilliams reiterated this drive for cooption in interview evidence, as part of a strategy of inducing change on the part of the major parties, and to ensure women's political participation in the Peace Talks and beyond, 'we never set ourselves up to be a permanent party. We set ourselves up to be a time-limited, Peace Talks-focused Party...we stayed longer than that...because you couldn't be part of the implementation of the Peace Agreement if you weren't part of the Assembly. So we had to get elected to the Assembly' (Interview: 26 November 2012).

However, evidence suggests that despite a foundational principle which sought the permeation of Coalition ideas into the established parties, the experience of electoral success drew the Women's Coalition into party politics and the Assembly establishment, and away from their base in the women's movement. Elizabeth Byrne McCullough, a former member of the Women's Coalition, wrote in 2004 that the failure to get re-elected, 'by most measures of political activism, is certainly considered a failure. Even though it is only part of what we set out to do, getting elected has gradually absorbed a huge proportion of our party energy and drive. It has dictated pace and even the substance of our work...in diminishing our radical edge it left us extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of highly polarised and increasingly adversarial politics' (Byrne McCullough, 2004: 11). The suggestion here is that the 'radical' platform that brought the Women's Coalition initial success had been diluted by the pressures of seeking re-election, amid a context of growing re-entrenchment into sectarian party politics to which the Coalition struggled to respond.

Byrne McCullough notes that, 'for the Women's Coalition, a party whose founding members had roots in community activism, there was a huge and entirely unrealistic expectation that we would be able to absorb the complex needs of the women's sector and address them single-handedly' (ibid: 7). McWilliams supports this judgement, 'it was hard to hold it together with that difference. The difference first across community, and then the difference of all these politically homeless people, who thought their cause was the only cause, and that the Coalition must prioritise that cause above all other causes' (Interview: 26 November 2012). The Coalition successfully used its bridging position in the Assembly on the women's movement's behalf by facilitating a lobby of Stormont in March 2002 to highlight a funding crisis in the movement, resulting in OFMDFM commissioning a survey into the services and status of women's organisations (Hillyard et al, 2006: 19). However, Kilmurray and McWilliams judge that, 'although a number of consultative conferences were organised...to

maintain contact with the wider women's and community movements (outside of the membership of the coalition itself) there was little time for broader alliance building around a platform of issues' (2001: 5).

The Coalition found it difficult to reconcile a desire both to change politics through formal participation and to remain faithful to their foundation in the women's movement. Byrne McCullough reflects that meetings were often held around the kitchen table, '[indicating] a need not to lose ourselves in the trappings of power and politics and a consciousness that our values as women politicians is deeply connected to that bond between our personal selves and that of other women' (Byrne McCullough, 2004: 8). Therefore, whilst Cowell-Meyers asserts that the Coalition was, 'a legitimate representative of the group in its accountability to the group. The party had deep roots in the women's movement, was authorized by the movement to act on its behalf, and sought to bridge the worlds of social and political activism' (2014: 66), this tension between the demands of elected politics and philosophy of women's movement activism represents a facet of the Coalition's failure.

This is supported by Jane Wilde, who alluded to a lack of unified, collective vision amongst members for its future, 'it was successful in its own achievements and then it didn't really have a way of deciding what it would do next – and things started to slightly fall apart; chinks started developing and people had different views and people wanted different things...I think it didn't know how to finish...not quite knowing what to do next. There were just different views (Interview: 22 June 2011). This suggests that the Coalition was caught between different ideological positions about the party's future. It had seized an opportunity for political innovation and had started as a feminist vanguard action; electoral success brought the possibility for more long-term influence, which for some members strayed too far from the party's foundational principles: 'Some people actually saw careers in this movement... [whereas] I had another career; I was really happy to give my life to this movement but it was a project' (ibid).

Therefore, Jane Wilde depicts the breakdown of the Coalition as one of confusion and lacking a clear drive or shared understanding, whilst Byrne McCullough acknowledges election defeat as the failure of the NIWC's goal as a political party. For McWilliams, however, the Women's Coalition did not wish to embed itself as a permanent fixture in the political establishment; rather, 'all we ever wanted was to be a vanguard action to the other parties, to make them more aware that they needed to be more inclusive of women, and overall to make the system incorporate women's interests. And I think we succeeded in both of those when we set out' (Interview: 26 November 2012). McWilliams' narrative is one of successful advancement of the Coalition's aims, a particular success for a party in which, 'we never set ourselves up to be a permanent party.' She paints the Coalition as a time-limited, impermanent strategic tool for effecting change at the formal political level. When read alongside other accounts, this shows a positive spin being placed on the period leading up to and immediately following electoral defeat. Margaret Ward describes the real sense both of loss at electoral defeat and of direction for moving forward:

It was devastating all the same losing the seats, it really was. So then that process of starting to think where were we going to go; the local government elections were coming up then, where were people going to stand as candidates, the reluctance then. I mean you can't have a political party if you don't have people wanting to stand for election. In terms of the South Belfast constituency, there was greater



reluctance. People knew that we weren't going to win, we were just getting squeezed, that space seemed to have gone. So there didn't seem to be a lot of point – we had put so much energy and I think creativity into the Assembly elections (Interview: 30 November 2012).

This is countered by Monica McWilliams, 'there was no sense of disappointment. I mean, we had already been together for 10 years, and people felt that was long enough, because we had only anticipated that we would be together at the most for two, and then another 5 was added on because we got elected...And then we said around 2005, look, it's time to wrap it up because everybody was involved in different organisations' (Interview: 26 November 2012). The varying accounts about the Coalition's reaction to electoral defeat, from a sense of loss and the dissipation of energies that had been creatively and tenaciously directed at re-election alongside an unwillingness amongst Coalition members and supporters to continue to engage, to defeat as the logical conclusion to the successful achievement of Coalition goals, suggests that whilst some of the Party's leaders have acknowledged a loss of direction and energy following defeat, there was a move by others to frame the NIWC's time as one of prevailing success and dissolution as part of a deliberate trajectory; perhaps as an effort to maintain morale and energy for transitioning back to a position of influence wielded from outside the formal political sphere.

Therefore, Monica McWilliams' assertion that, 'we'd always been reluctantly elected because none of us had thought of that when we set out anyway' (Interview: 26 November 2012) and that Party activists were back in their jobs by 2003 (ibid) suggests a narrative of seamless return and re-absorption back into civil society with little disarray or collective evaluation, a judgement which is contradicted by other leading figures; for instance, the 'crisis' period as described by Byrne McCullough, 'the first months of this year have been amongst the hardest in the history of NIWC. As a party we have been faced with some pretty searching questions and unpalatable answers' (Byrne McCullough, 2004: 1). Nevertheless, the NIWC was considering ways to move beyond the crisis of electoral defeat and ensure continued influence over policy, with Byrne McCullough depicting this crisis period as a positive opportunity to move beyond the weaknesses of a political party through new kinds of engagement, 'there is considerable agreement that we must combine some of the characteristics of a pressure group with...the ability to produce strong and radical position papers, which have the capacity to exert influence in broader and more creative ways than has previously been possible' (ibid: 11-12).

There is also evidence of efforts to emphasise the positive and lasting political influence of the NIWC, 'there was the feeling that because the Coalition existed the other parties were putting more women forward as candidates, which they certainly were...And there are champions now in the Assembly, say in the DUP, that you would never have thought in the past' (Interview, Margaret Ward: 30 November 2012). Avila Kilmurray supports this judgement, 'certainly I don't think you would have had women Ministers without that. And it gave ammunition to women inside those parties to say, look what's happening here' (Interview: 18 July 2011). By finding successes and a legacy, and indeed painting this failure as an opportunity to re-position and re-focus, there is evidence of narrative creation by leaders to enable a positive way forward, and of seeking success amid electoral failure; taking the achievements of the Coalition and plotting a new strategic course that capitalises on the NIWC's strengths whilst avoiding its weaknesses.

Interview evidence and scholarly analyses therefore support the judgement that the Women's Coalition did not translate its bridging social capital in civil society into sustainable bridging ties at the political level because of the re-entrenchment of sectarian political identity, dominated by men and to the detriment of a more inclusive politics. They have also shown that the Women's Coalition struggled to maintain a collective understanding of its role and aims following initial successes, and in the absence of a unified vision, proved unsustainable amid strengthening ethnonational party affiliation amongst the electorate. Whilst the Women's Coalition was faced with the 'reification of ethnonational identity politics' (Byrne, 2009: 110), with the return to dominance of sectarian voting patterns, there was also a tension within the Party itself about what its future should be. Having been formed with a clear set of goals linked to a particular political moment, the Women's Coalition struggled to maintain the consensus that had underpinned its early success. Leading members have advanced positive narratives of strategic success in order to move forward from electoral defeat and party dissolution, and enable a re-strategising process built upon strength rather than failure.

Evidence below will explore how this strategic re-direction was undertaken. First, however, we need to consider both the legacy of the Women's Coalition and the new political landscape in Northern Ireland after its demise, in order to understand the context for the women's movement's post-NIWC strategy. Scholars have pointed to examples of lasting NIWC policy contributions which support claims made by leading party members, and have served to shape the equality agenda of post-Peace Agreement Northern Ireland. One could hypothesise that invoking this legacy may be useful for movement leaders in their efforts to influence policy without the insider status of a political party. Galligan argues that the recognition of gender equality in the Agreement is attributable to the Coalition's efforts during the Talks; an achievement which should not be under-estimated because, 'the structural recognition of ethnonational identity pervading political and public discourse in Northern Ireland suppresses the articulation of other differences, including gender roles and the subject positioning of women' (Galligan, 2013: 415).

Cowell-Meyers' observation that the established parties responded to the Women's Coalition by giving greater visibility to female party members is framed as a success on the part of the NIWC, and as evidence of co-option of the gender equality agenda embodied and promulgated by the Coalition. She notes that the Women's Coalition is broadly recognised for having delivered gender equality language and passages in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement on victims, integrated education, integrated living, community development and the Civic Forum in the Peace Agreement (Cowell-Meyers, 2011: 415), thereby managing to effect 'contagion' of a more encompassing equality agenda onto other parties. As Fearon argues, in the aftermath of the NIWC's formation, a time when the Coalition was the focus of much domestic and international media attention, parties were 'falling over themselves to highlight their women candidates' (Fearon, 1999: 19).

Meanwhile, Galligan asserts that, 'the very existence of the Women's Coalition has legitimised parity between women and men. It has forced party leaderships to take their women members more seriously, to promote women to positions of power within parties, and to encourage women's political development' (Galligan, 2002: 7). This is also emphasised by Donaghy, who notes that the Coalition facilitated the expansion of Northern Ireland's traditional definition of equality beyond religion (Donaghy, 2004: 29). The result to which the Women's Coalition contributed was an advanced equality machinery and set of institutions, such as a Gender Policy Unit within the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister with

the objective that, 'attention to gender equality will pervade all policies, strategies and activities so that all women and all men influence, participate in and benefit equitably from all interventions' (OFMDFM, 2008: 4); the establishment of the Equality Commission; a statutory mainstreaming equality agenda (Section 75), and the proposal and development of a Single Equality Bill. Donaghy argues that it took bold initiatives like the Women's Coalition to disrupt the dominance of a political discourse around religious discrimination and inject gender issues into the main political debates. This, combined with the established initiatives, delivered a culture in which discussions around equality mechanisms were familiar, foundations for developments had been laid, and resistance to suggestions of advanced equality machinery had been minimised (Donaghy, 2003: 5).

Ridden argues that a legacy of the Women's Coalition was its emphasis on a wider conception of politics, 'in which civil society acts as a control on the political process and also generates a new understanding of how public and private spheres relate', and generation of a debate about how to develop political institutions that encourage civil society and pluralism (Ridden, 2001: 111-112). This is reflected in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, which is, 'the blueprint for a reassessment of the conceptual and institutional basis of democracy and governance for its citizenry. The procedural rules of the Assembly contain a refinement of representative government from the majoritarian to the consensual' (McCall and Williamson, 2001: 369). Ruane and Todd note that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 'respects the right of the majority to determine the constitutional status of Northern Ireland but provides elaborate safeguards for the rights and interests of the minority, guaranteeing proportionality of representation and participation at all levels of decision-making'; inaugurating a transformative process to move Northern Ireland beyond conflict (Ruane and Todd, 2001: 928 and 935).

The influence of the Women's Coalition's drive towards a different style of governance can be seen in the new legislative equality structures, notably the Section 56 provision of the subsequent 1998 Northern Ireland Act, providing for the establishment of a 'consultative Civic Forum.' The Agreement stated that the Civic Forum, 'will act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues'; it was conceived and secured by the efforts of the NIWC negotiation leadership who were part of the Civic Forum Study Group in 1998 and 1999 (McCall and Williamson, 2001: 364 and 373). The budget for the Civic Forum was fixed at £370,000 for the first year of its operation, with the first plenary session of the Forum taking place on 9 October 2000 (ibid: 365). The Civic Forum can be seen as an attempt to embed a participatory and consultative democratic style that recognises the local expertise of civil society, by bringing representatives from community and voluntary organisations, trade unions, business and other civil society partners together to address social and economic need.

The idea for a Civic Forum was first developed in the NIWEP (at that time chaired by Bronagh Hinds) response paper submitted to the British government in 1996 and outlined in Chapter 3, entitled *Genderproofing the Election System and Talks Fora*. The paper formed a foundation for the NIWC's policy platform and its proposals made during the Talks; including the principle of inclusion and harnessing civil society in the political process in the form of a Civic Forum. As Fearon recounts, Bronagh Hinds carried this agenda through the NIWC's Peace negotiations: ' "I don't think that people have really understood that we have come here with an agenda as well. And I'm telling you [NIO liaison representative] that because we are getting things left out of the draft paper. Let me tell you that the Civic Forum is our bottom line. No Civic Forum, we have to consider our position" ' (ibid: 103). As noted in the previous chapter, a

women's movement agenda to see greater and more diverse civil society consultation in policy-making was therefore in evidence before the electoral failure of the Women's Coalition; serving as a foundation for strategic re-direction following the party's disbanding.

However, the reinstatement of the Assembly following the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement brought elected politicians back to political power, many of whom viewed a participative institution like the Civic Forum with hostility, 'political ambivalence towards participation and the Civic Forum is founded on the view that the social partners pose a threat to representative democracy' (McCall and Williamson, 2001: 378). Therefore, despite a narrative at the highest levels of British politics at the time of the Agreement that, 'too often in the past government programs damaged social capital—sending in experts but ignoring community organisations, investing in bricks and mortar but not in people. In the future we need to invest in social capital as surely as we invest in skills and building' (Tony Blair in *ibid*: 370), the post-Agreement equality architecture was from its establishment in fundamental opposition to a newly empowered political class suspicious of the involvement it gave to civil society, with this formalised civil society forum seen as a competitor to government.

#### **4. Post-Women's Coalition strategic adaptation in a new equality landscape**

The above section has outlined the transformations in Northern Ireland's legislative and statutory equality agenda. Tools like departmental equality action plans and new statutory agencies like the Equality Commission all contribute to a framework that seeks to see the strands of equality embedded in all policy, and it was this environment to which the post-NIWC women's movement had to adapt. In her analysis of the Women's Coalition as movement-party, Cowell-Meyers notes that most scholars of social movements tend to conceptualise them as aiming to achieve both policy goals ('new advantages') and acceptance of the movement as representative of legitimate interests ('process change'); with acceptance coming as consultation, negotiation, recognition and inclusion in the process of policy formation. However, 'because it is very difficult to measure outcomes outside of policy initiatives, most literature on social movement outcomes has focused on legislation or some other aspect of policy change...Much less attention is paid to the efficacy of movements in gaining acceptance or access' (Cowell-Meyers, 2014: 65).

The author argues that the access sought by identity-based movements like the women's movement goes beyond access via consultation to inclusion of the previously marginalised in formal political processes; recognising that policy goals would not be addressed unless they were included in decision-making (*ibid*). Cowell-Meyers analyses the extent to which the women's movement as political party succeeded in changing the patterns of democratic representation for women, noting that the tactic of 'movement qua party' delivered gains with the potential for long-term influence over policy and cultural values. This was a notable achievement of the Women's Coalition and the women's movement qua party, however it leaves a critical point to be addressed: having deployed this tactic and achieved some measure of success at prompting a contagion effect in terms of women's representation in other parties and society more widely, how did the women's movement react and change its agenda following electoral failure, when its formal political presence via the Coalition was no longer sustainable? Following the failure to embed bridging ties within the Assembly, the movement had to develop a new strategy to operate within the framework of the post-Northern Ireland Act structures, in an environment where positive contagion for women's representation was

not sustained and did not see a strong political coalition within Stormont advocating for women's rights.

Margaret Ward explained the need to adapt to this new environment, characterised by a raft of newly-established equality mechanisms. In reference to the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group, she noted that, 'it was set up initially eight years ago I think – there were more policy workers at that time; it was a time of much more expansion – to help people with the equality schemes and all the things in terms of Section 75 and outworkings' (Interview: 28 June 2011). Moreover,

It came into being whenever the funding started being withdrawn and what was happening was that the Government was supporting the so-called service sector, the ones who went out and did the classes, but they didn't like policy work because we were the ones who were constantly annoying the living daylights out of them. And for organisations with policy workers, their funding stopped and they were losing their policy workers so it was an attempt to ensure that policy was still on the agenda (Interview, Ann Hope: 28 June 2011).

This points to a strategic decision amongst leading policy workers in the women's movement to adapt to government reallocation of funds and support away from their work; they sought a collaborative approach that strengthened bridging ties to ensure that links with policy-makers (and so policy influence) could be preserved. The arrival of a new consociational arrangement and its attendant equality provisions therefore combined with the Women's Coalition's electoral failure to necessitate a new approach to activism and engagement with policy-makers, which built on efforts begun in the pre-Agreement period to adapt to the Government's social capital agenda which had been developing from the 1990s. As Margaret Ward and Ann Hope underline, however, the development of structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group was also a reactive step to preserve a clear and powerful policy voice in the face of a retrenching government agenda hostile to voluntary sector policy influence.

Margaret Ward explained the decision taken by women's movement leaders to undertake this strategy as it became clear that the Women's Coalition was becoming unsustainable:

We had an Executive Day in the Ulster People's College in 2004 after the election, and Avila [Kilmurray] was asked... [to] assess where we are. [She] started to talk about what the options were – as a political party; what's distinctive, what do we bring to the table, is there the energy. And then where could we go - were we going to be a pressure group, if we were going to be, who else was around in order to link up, what kind of message which we have is going to be distinctive, or could we look at our role as lobbying and educational. So it's political party, a pressure group, or option C, she put community change for want of a better name.

And that was really about looking at where we were with women's organisations, maybe other political people we could link in with, and be a kind of working group and maintain the profile...we then started to look at where people were and what people's profiles [were], because a lot of the Coalition had moved into other statutory organisations like the Human Rights Commission or the Equality Commission or whatever, and realised that people were still in those decision-

making arenas, and could we...have some kind of forum where we would continue to meet and develop thinking and support...And there was a bit of appetite that we would come together as a kind of forum every so often in order to maybe have thematic discussion or get together...it did happen I suppose in terms of the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group (Interview: 30 November 2012).

Monica McWilliams also pointed to the focus amongst Women's Coalition leaders upon policy influence with the waning of NIWC electoral influence, 'we were all back in our jobs from 2003, and there was a Women's Policy Forum formed...through the Forum and through other different activities the women remained active and they were writing Manifestos for the parties...[and] responding to policy submissions...people had different interest in different parts of the policy-making, and they pursued that through their various roles. But we all still stayed together' (Interview: 26 November 2012).

These quotes demonstrate that NIWC leaders, recognising the need for strategic change following a failed re-election campaign, considered possible structural alternatives to bridging ties at the Assembly level which drew upon their strategic and expert positions across the voluntary and statutory sectors. This included considering the role of women's movement leaders in civil and political positions of authority, and how this could be capitalised upon to ensure influence. As Margaret Ward continued, 'a lot of people who were interested in the Coalition weren't particularly policy people and this would be focused on policy'; that is, leaders in the women's movement identified a need to move towards a more rigorous and proactive policy focus to enable influence in order to advance the movement's agenda. This is clearly articulated in meeting Minutes of an early incarnation of the Ad Hoc Policy Group, then called the Policy Group, with participants including WSN, NIWEP, WRDA and NICVA, 'there is a lack of connection; a lack of information about who is doing what. We aren't using the other agencies because we don't have time or resources to make connections, or share ideas, or to set our own agenda. We are taken up with reacting to Government agendas... [and] delivering services (because that is what we are paid to do) and our policy work is marginalised because of this' (Policy Group: 2002).

This strategic imperative had also been debated at a seminar on 9 June 2003, hosted by the Area Development Management/Combat Poverty Agency (ADM/CPA) – an Intermediary Funding Body of PEACE I and II - entitled: 'Women & Peace-Building in Ireland - identifying the research gaps.' The seminar brought together key representatives of the women's movement, public authorities and academics from Ireland north and south; it was held in the context both of ADM/CPA's funding of research into the sustainability of women's organisations in the southern border counties of Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Office's (the Assembly was in suspension at this time) release for consultation of *A Shared Future* which dealt with good relations policy. This seminar saw a robust debate about what participants (among them, leading figures for a number of years in the Northern Ireland movement, including Ann Hope and Margaret Ward and counterparts from the Republic of Ireland) believed was needed to strengthen their collective voice and have influence over policy formation and practice.

Dympna McGlade from the CRC judged that, 'I don't believe there is a comprehensive, cohesive voice coming forward. The idea...of putting forward research into a programme is a good idea, but...who takes responsibility, and how do we coordinate that?...There has been a lot of good work...but I don't think we've put forward a very effective voice or a voice that represents all the women we're talking about' (ADM/CPA, 2003: 33). Ann Hope pointed to an

ideological frame within the Government's good relations approach which prioritised Catholic-Protestant relations above a more nuanced and complex understanding: 'We're back down to Protestant and Catholic as opposed to all the many facets which make up the issues which actually engage us — around not just community relations but...around the perspectives that go to make us up as women, as feminists, as trade unionists, as whatever...So what we're really looking for is a community relations document that has a breadth to it' (ibid: 35).

The absence of a gendered analysis in the Government's good relations agenda was therefore a critical concern for a 'fragmented' (ibid: 33) women's movement; particularly in the immediate aftermath of the NIWC's electoral defeat and failure of strategic bridging ties at the Assembly level. Indeed, the seminar participants expressed more widespread concerns about the absence of gender analysis across the policy agenda. Margaret Ward argued for the importance of, 'the women's sector to have policy workers who can intervene in policy debates and make the case for women...The Programme for Government has mentioned childcare, once. It's fallen off of the agenda, and we need to have that very sustained critique of policy' (ibid: 38). She continued that, 'the development of the women's sector has not been incorporated into all of the different institutions and initiatives here. There are women-specific programmes but they're under-resourced, marginalised, and women's economic needs and priorities have been subordinated to men's. We need more research to address underlying gender issues in government and economic reconstruction' (ibid: 41).

An approach was suggested that would seek to bring together this awareness of gender's absence in policy-making with a strong research focus: 'We need a lot more work...to have a paradigm shift in the attitudes of male society...I don't think it can be achieved until we have a coherent programme that considers the gendered nature of decision making and challenges the masculine ethos of our society; research that emphasises our international obligations to include gender in conflict resolution' (Ward in ibid: 44). Ann Hope built on this idea by pointing to the need to connect, 'women who are beaver away in the background just to try to influence a change of policy at a different level. We need to tie them in, make contact, build up support groups for women on public bodies to feed them through the stuff that needs fed through. We should think about...how we structure that. Also to encourage...more and more women to come at all those consultative documents and look for a shared perspective' (ibid: 49).

Women's movement leaders were therefore engaged in sustained and focused debate about propelling the movement forward in a united, policy-led manner, in order to challenge the gender neutral status quo and establish linking ties, including at the international level. This document shows the discussions amongst women's movement leaders that were happening at a critical juncture in the movement's strategic direction; in the context of the electoral failure of the Women's Coalition, the Government good relations strategy, and the move away from supporting policy and research work by the PEACE funds. This seminar is a clear example of the conversations which underpinned and supported the development of the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group, which itself serves as the leading example of a strategic re-direction towards working collaboratively to produce rigorous policy ideas and responses, in order to create a strong bridging foundation with which to establish linking ties to policy-makers. The use of phrases like 'shared perspective' also show evidence of discussions about the need for a common vision within the movement following the Women's Coalition's failure to embed and extend one from above. As will be explored below, the Ad Hoc Policy Group departs from the Women's Coalition strategy of formal party political engagement and

emphasises flexibility, and it will be argued that this was a clear strategic response to the failure of Coalition strategy and the movement's needs in a new post-1998 equality landscape.

Moreover, this emphasis upon seeking policy influence as the strategic goal of working through structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group can be seen in documentation from the early years of the Group. In the report of the Ad Hoc Policy Group-convened Seminar, 'Women's Equality: International Standards - Local Strategies' on 28 April 2005, the author notes the clear strategic aim of developing linking ties to policy-makers through the Group, and using international standards to exert influence over policy at home and seek to effect change - an approach which is demonstrably led from a core leadership group and will be explored in depth in Chapter 6:

The group was highly active during the consultation on OFMDFM's cross-departmental 'Gender Matters' strategy, making plain its disquiet on the limitations of the strategy by providing a widely circulated Briefing Paper. It was felt that a constructive approach to the next stage of the gender strategy would be to organise an event that would set out the international benchmarks for women's rights that our local strategy should emulate, while providing an opportunity for discussion between policy makers and representatives of voluntary organisations (Ward, 2005: 7).

The Seminar report shows the nature of linking ties sought by policy leaders in the Ad Hoc Policy Group; when the OFMDFM representative expressed disappointment at the Group's negative feedback and suggested a future meeting, 'Margaret Ward...on behalf of the Ad Hoc Policy Group, replied that the strength of the response was a measure of women's determination to have a policy that was radical and inclusive' (ibid). A central facet of this strategy is therefore a level of critical engagement with government policy proposals; producing evidence to inform the Assembly in their policy development whilst using the Group's platform to be critical of government when called for. This can be clearly seen in the Ad Hoc Policy Group's proposed Bill of Rights consultation response: 'We do not propose to enter into an analysis of what has been suggested in the NIO Consultation paper as to do so would be to legitimise a series of propositions and suggestions that fail to reflect any gender imperatives in the realization of rights...[the "Next Steps" document] fails in its entirety to address and redress the historic and current disadvantages and rights violations facing women' (Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group, 2010: 1).

The Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group therefore emerged from a recognised need to maintain the depth of policy cooperation that was a feature of the Women's Coalition, as well as to ensure collective understanding and action around new statutory equality mechanisms. This is strongly articulated in Minutes from April 2002, 'to pool resources and establish a division of labour within the sector to address the policy agenda, more effective working on work we are doing anyway, north/south exchanges of information..., [the] policy group should be "energising" and "fun", the group will be "ideas focussed" ' (Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group: 2002). The Group was to be, 'open to those working on women's policy...The group should involve key women working on the policy agenda. The following list of groups/people to be invited to become members was agreed. It was also agreed that additional people may be invited to join, on the basis of prior agreement by the group' (ibid), pointing to a clear direction



being set by leaders, acting as gate-keepers to participation, with regard to how the Group will operate and who should be involved.

This new structure represents a clear departure from the strategy pursued through the Women's Coalition of creating a unified vision through the structures and procedures of a political party; instead emphasising flexibility and issue-specific engagement to propel agreement and action, rather than a foundation of pre-agreed principles and commitments. It has been meeting on a monthly-to six weekly basis since 2004 (Interview, Margaret Ward: 28 June 2011; the earliest Minutes are from 2002 but it is unclear when the Group was 'officially' constituted), and is comprised of representatives from across the spectrum of women's organisations in Northern Ireland. The ad hoc nature of the Group was a conscious move to allow for a flexible and rapid response to policy developments as they occur.

As Lynn Carvill described, 'meetings are usually every six weeks but if we need to meet more often, then we do. It allows anybody who is interested in policy that impacts on women, or feminism or LGBT rights or where there's just somewhere where it's about women, that they can go...It means that we rapidly respond collectively' (Interview: 22 June 2011). She emphasised the extent to which the unstructured format facilitates the Group's work and enables her to put the Group's shared aims into immediate action: 'Ad hoc doesn't denigrate it in any way – structured is no good. It's freedom and fluidity and it's the ability to respond to something rapidly that makes it powerful. And quite a lot of my work has ended up coming from there; my job is freer in order to do things that it needs' (ibid).

This Group is a noteworthy example of the kinds of bridging ties that made the NIWC possible; that is, a coalition of individuals and organisations pooling their expertise to work collectively on issues agreed upon through compromise and transversal politics. As Bronagh Hinds explained, the Group was, 'deliberately called ad hoc because there's been a kind of push away from having one overarching women's organisation, and this allows people to be free and to be part of it. It's self-directed by the people who are in it and the lead is taken by whatever the issue is' (Interview: 28 June 2011). That is, it works to utilise collective expertise and form shared positions and actions, by creating a level of consensus and minimising conflict. The drive away from an 'overarching' lead structure that imposes constraints on the nature of engagement points to a move away from the strategy of the Women's Coalition and an attempt to resolve the weaknesses that led to its failure: instead, the emphasis is on freedom and flexibility, words repeated by several interviewees.

Meetings are led by individuals or organisations with particular expertise in the area of focus, such that a 'policy base mix' is created (Interview, Ann Hope: 28 June 2011); crucially, working to minimise the dominance of one group at the expense of a collective voice on given issues, whilst resisting a unitary vision or ideology that lead organisations or individuals can seek to impose. Moreover, this structure relies upon the networks of attending organisations to ensure that participation is as wide as possible, 'the network groups that are in the Policy Group have to feed it down, so there's the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network who have groups all over, the Women's Support Network that supports women's centres all over, or the WRDA that supports the women's regional partnership and women in different places, so that's how it filters down' (Interview, Bronagh Hinds: 28 June 2011).

As Figure 2 shows, leaders from umbrella and membership organisations like NIWEP and NIRWN participate in the Group and feed in the expertise and interests of the groups that they represent. When a particular policy requires discussion or a meeting request with the Group has been made by government, the WRDA as the Secretariat notify members, who in

turn circulate information to their networks. A key feature of the Ad Hoc Policy Group is proceeding from a core set of policy issues upon which the participants can mutually agree. As Margaret Ward explained, members, 'have very clear issues and we work together really well in order to forward them. There hasn't really been a position where people have disagreed with each other on issues because there haven't been those kinds of areas; it's been much more on childcare, or women and work or representation or funding the sector – things that people have been in common accord with' (Interview: 28 June 2011).

This foundation of shared core issues therefore contributes to the women's movement's ability to create consensus, pool expertise and resources, and so develop a response in a way that minimises disagreement and ideological negotiation. This is a clear strategic re-direction from the Women's Coalition approach: a political party operates with a set of pre-agreed policies that it presents to the electorate, which has been shown to have been problematic for an ideologically and methodologically diverse women's movement whose interests and agendas could not be fully met through the Coalition. The Ad Hoc Policy Group seeks to address the constraints that this approach places on agreement by approaching each policy separately and seeking consensus on an issue-by-issue basis. There is therefore no requirement for overall unity on a set of policies and ideological positions; each policy is taken as it comes and a course of action identified, allowing alliances to be built around a broader platform of issues.

The Ad Hoc Policy Group therefore represents a revised, pragmatic approach which is suited to the diversity of the women's movement and recognition that collective action is more effectively achieved through a consensus-driven approach around certain issues and not by seeking to impose a unified vision from above. This is in contrast to the position described by Little (2002), in which the NIWC failed in part because of its adoption of an essentialist stance and thus the absence of a politics built on true heterogeneity. Similarly, Dobrowolsky's judgement (2002) that the Coalition attempted to build a common agenda in which to bury differences by side-stepping contentious issues is addressed by this approach, in which shared agendas are sought but on an issue-by-issue basis, correcting the pitfalls that imposing a single agenda or vision can bring. However, this strategy does fundamentally rely upon the agency of key leaders acting to disseminate information down and across their networks, and ensure that the composition of the Ad Hoc Policy Group reflects the policy and grassroots expertise that is needed for strong and collective agreement on particular issues. By assembling a core of expert group representatives, a number of which are from umbrella organisations (such as NIWEP and WSN) whose commitment is to spread the decisions out through their networks, the Ad Hoc Policy Group acts as an arena for leaders to develop collective positions and policy, address and try to resolve conflict, and determine shared actions.

Interviewees emphasise the freedom to engage (or not engage) in a flexible manner, however the emphasis on issue-specific policy expertise means that leaders seek to draw in a policy 'elite'; ensuring that the expertise and agency of leading policy experts in the movement is driving the Group forward: 'we pull in different [people]. So for instance Marie Cavanagh [Gingerbread NI] doesn't attend the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group but she's on the e-list so she gets the stuff. When we were doing welfare reform we were going right, one of the key hits is on lone parents, get her in. So you can pull them in' (Lynn Carvill: 27 November 2012). This is reflected in Figure 2, in which single issue organisations or women's centres, for example, are represented on the Group through the membership organisations to which they belong, but also bypass this representational level when their particular expertise is drawn

upon for specific policy matters. Moreover, the emphasis on flexibility reported in interviews sits alongside the clear designation of leaders of the Group. Margaret Ward noted that, 'I think since Lynn's been here as the lobbyist, there's been much more reliance on WRDA as the Secretariat' (Interview: 28 June 2011), whilst Emma Patterson-Bennett commented that, 'it's one of those groups that when you're really super busy and you don't go, it's fine if you go 3 months later. Now NIWEP don't because we have 100% said that someone must sit on it every month, but there are groups who can't come all the time' (Interview: 10 December 2013). This suggests that there is a core leadership shaping the Group's direction and driving decisions forward.

In addition to the leadership role in ensuring strong bridging ties within the Ad Hoc Policy Group, leadership agency is central to maintaining linking ties to policy-makers. Lynn Carvill commented that, 'we're looking to meet with the Junior Minister to discuss the Gender Equality Strategy and we were told by the Minister, you come through the Ad Hoc Policy Group, if you want us to listen and to have the people there that need to hear you, you need to have your breadth and diversity of organisations' (Interview: 27 November 2012). As Emma Patterson-Bennett explained, meetings between the Ad Hoc Policy Group and MLAs and policy-makers are led by certain individuals from the Group: 'I got a meeting with Mark Durkan [MLA] to talk about women in local government and our whole reform...So myself, Lynn, Bronagh and one other person who nominates themselves from the Ad Hoc Policy Group are going to go to that meeting' (Interview: 10 December 2013); in this instance, leading representatives from the WRDA (Lynn Carvill), NIWEP (Emma Patterson-Bennett) and DemocraShe (Bronagh Hinds).

A core group of leaders engage in dialogue with policy-makers, transmitting the Ad Hoc Policy Group's position on particular issues and feeding in to consultation processes; for instance, representing the Group at departmental committee hearings at Stormont (see DSD, 2012; amongst the four Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group representatives at the DSD committee hearing were Lynn Carvill and Bronagh Hinds once again). One can argue that this is of benefit to government, for whom engagement with the Group can serve as proxy for the breadth of policy expertise across the women's movement in a single structure, as clear from Figure 2. Moreover, structured dialogue with government through the Gender Advisory Panel, which advises Departments on their gender action plans and is comprised of leading civil society figures (the organisational leaders who are Gender Advisory Panel members is shown in Figure 2, including leaders from WRDA and Women's Aid), is closely tied to leadership in the Ad Hoc Policy Group, 'usually women who are sitting on the Gender Advisory Panel would be from the Women's [Ad Hoc] Policy Group, and they bring back something there' (Interview, Ann Hope and Bronagh Hinds: 28 June 2011).

Furthermore, the Ad Hoc Policy Group has forged a strong connection with the Equality Commission, which offers a neutral location for the Group to meet. As Liz Law from the Commission noted, 'we do support...the Ad Hoc Policy Group...It is now a very active, confident group of policy-makers in the women's sector, and from time to time people other than me have come along to it to talk about other powers of enforcement and so on' (Interview: 6 July 2011). This indicates that there is now a post-Women's Coalition strategy of engaging, in the context of a specific collective endeavour, with a key institution of the new consociational arrangement. The Equality Commission as a statutory agency that is legally enshrined in the Northern Ireland Act means that it represents an important ally for the women's movement and alternative conduit for influencing government. This relationship

therefore serves to facilitate the workings of the women's movement's bridging social capital; providing a space external to the movement that equalises the participating groups, as well as offering equality policy expertise that is politically non-affiliated and which can be shared with and utilised by the women's movement.

However, interview material pointed to some dissatisfaction with the relationship between the Ad Hoc Policy Group and the Equality Commission, notably the latter's failure to take a strong leadership role on key issues. Margaret Ward recalled that during the consultation around the Government's Gender Equality Strategy there was widespread disquiet within the women's movement about the Strategy's weakness:

Now the Equality Commission which were on the Gender [Advisory] Panel should have done something then, but the Ad Hoc Group had a meeting and we said what are we going to do, we need to write to Rooker and say don't publish it. So I wrote to Rooker on behalf of the Group and said 'if you publish this we're going to disown it.' And I was told later that the Equality Commission said 'oh, Margaret Ward has written a letter and we're pleased', but they should have written that...So I do think that we substitute sometimes for work that they should be doing (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Whilst the close relationship with the Equality Commission is therefore an important feature of the Ad Hoc Policy Group's ability to position itself in the process of policy influence, the Commission's reticence in taking a forceful line on issues appears to propel the Ad Hoc Policy Group into a strong leadership role; something which may in fact be of benefit in positioning the Group as a leading policy interlocutor.

The structure and philosophy of the Ad Hoc Policy Group is therefore an example of the women's movement's post-NIWC strategy; reasserting the strong bridging ties that supported and facilitated the Women's Coalition to establish a strongly networked movement: 'The overall aim of the group is to work in partnership in sharing information and discussing research, thereby collectively strengthening the gender dimension of policy making throughout Ireland' (Ward, 2005: 8). This is essential to enabling a robust foundation from which to establish linking ties to the Government, and the next chapter will show how the women's movement works through structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group to reach and influence policy-makers and politicians, as well as the tensions that this creates.

The Ad Hoc Policy Group serves as a powerful cohesive tool for the women's movement and a forum for generating ideas, responses and positions, under the direction and management of key leaders. As Lynn Carvill noted, 'generally – I'm trying to think – I have not personally experienced any crap in it. I've experienced it everywhere else, but it hasn't filtered through to there' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Lynn argued that despite the existence of 'huge tensions' currently in the women's movement regarding resources and position, the Ad Hoc Policy Group creates a policy-oriented environment; 'it's just that it's that kind of open, and the discussion is policy... [it has] never been where an issue was controversial...policies in terms of progressing gender equality in a Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group are not controversial' (ibid).

However, whilst the issues under discussion do not in themselves produce or exacerbate conflict within the movement, existing tensions impact on the Ad Hoc Policy Group in terms of participation. As Lynn Carvill explained, 'maybe some people feel they're excluded

from it, but they're self-excluding, you will be self-excluding if you are' (ibid). This apparent self-exclusion ties into a larger underlying friction in the women's movement, which can be characterised as resulting from deviation from the prevailing culture alongside a sustained crisis in funding for women's organisations. Women from the movement describe a culture in which the delineation of expertise and responsibility amongst and between groups is clearly set, although this is not without challenge and conflict as will be seen in the following chapter in relation to the impact of the Government's social capital agenda. For instance, Margaret Ward explained that, 'NIWEP is in the position of being our outward-facing organisation in terms of meeting on a regular basis with the devolved regions, whereas the rest of us don't tend to do that' (Interview: 28 June 2011). In personnel terms, NIWEP is a small organisation (albeit with reach far beyond its size). This therefore means that the women's movement recognises organisational leadership across significant policy areas to be the remit of a single small organisation, represented by a small core group of leaders.

Members of the group attest to a prevailing culture; when leaders come in from outside the women's movement and deviate from this culture it can create widespread tensions, 'there are individuals within the sector who've come in from other sectors and have never been involved, and actually they don't even understand, and there's no way they're feminists at all – *at all*. But [they] are heading up women's organisations, that's what's hard to deal with' (Interview, Margaret Ward: 30 November 2012). This was supported by Bronagh Hinds, who observed that, 'it's really coming from one source, supported by one or two other people...it's quite nasty and it's about wanting dominance of the women's sector...The women with feminist principles wouldn't behave like that; it's coming from a particular source, led by someone who isn't grounded in the women's sector and feminist principles' (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Eileen Sung from OFMDFM noted this tension in relation to the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP)<sup>1</sup> (of which the WRDA was a lead partner) and Training for Women Network (TWN), 'they will come together over common issues, they will have a common voice on common issues. But on other issues they will not only diverge, there will not only be philosophical and almost didactic differences, but there will also be personality differences, territorial disputes – all sorts of things in terms of the spheres of interest' (Interview: 28 June 2011). The Ad Hoc Policy Group can therefore be seen as an attempt both to cement the feminist culture to which key leaders attest in order to advance policy aims, and also to show a united voice to government – which as Eileen Sung shows, is aware of tensions within the movement – on policy matters by creating an environment in which consensus can be achieved on an issue-specific basis.

As such, the agency exercised by these leaders is significant, moderated in the Ad Hoc Policy Group by a self-selecting group of individuals from other leading organisations positioned as experts or representatives. This understanding that certain groups have the responsibility for specific areas of policy, or are the link to particular parts of the community, is crucial to tying the women's movement together (at least, the network of organisations who participate in such structures) and propelling its work forward, with forums like the Ad Hoc Policy Group then serving as the mechanism for feeding in this knowledge in a collective manner. Leaders also then have a role in ensuring that a shared culture remains intact to

---

<sup>1</sup> A consortium comprised of the WRDA, WSN, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network and the Women's Centre, Derry; as well as fourteen women's centres across Northern Ireland

support the effective functioning of the Group. As such, the strategic re-direction of strong bridging ties as a foundation for links to policy-makers fundamentally depends on allegiance to a dominant culture of reciprocal sharing and respect for the boundaries of perceived responsibility for each organisation.

Additional mechanisms have also been established as part of the strategic re-direction after the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the electoral failure of the Women's Coalition, in order to further develop the foundation of strong bridging ties that characterises the new strategy. The intention to establish a Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group (to mirror other UK Women's Budget Groups based in England and Scotland) demonstrates efforts to bring together policy workers in the women's movement and related sectors to create an informed and collective position from which to lobby policy-makers, 'there really is no gender budgeting happening here whatsoever; this would allow us to say 'if you don't use tools to see impact this is having on 50% of your population, it means you're not equality impact-assessing at all.' We want to be a voice responding on behalf of women to government' (Interview, Lynn Carvill: 22 June 2011). A second interview in 2012 with Lynn Carvill revealed developments in establishing and running this new Group:

We've had two meetings and we've had an event...we have a Group and an e-list, that's literally since September. So we have a funding application that we hear about next week maybe, just for a graduate intern for one day a week...All the expertise is around the table and they're happy to go to meetings; and they're really interesting people, it's not just women's sector – it's women and men actually who are interested in the issue. We've money for a website development, so we'll have a proper launch next spring...I think it'll float (Interview: 27 November 2012).

The newly-constituted Women's Budget Group is therefore a further example of a mechanism established to implement a strategy of creating strong bridging ties, based upon seeking consensus and informed policy positions with which to influence government. As with the Ad Hoc Policy Group, this is a self-selecting group that has been developed through the leadership agency of principal figures within the movement. It is certainly possible that groups and individuals who self-exclude from the Ad Hoc Policy Group choose to do the same in this context, which has implications for the implementation of developing strategic linking ties to policy-makers where it is hampered by division in the women's movement and imperfectly formed bridging ties. The success of the strategy of establishing strong bridging ties through such mechanisms in order to develop linking social capital will be assessed in the following chapter, by analysing evidence for linking social capital and the extent to which this strategy has proven effective in advancing the women's movement's agenda.

## **5. The new equality framework**

Section 4 set out the lasting impact of the Women's Coalition in the establishment of an equality agenda written into the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and in new equality mechanisms. This section will outline the key features of this new equality framework and use interview and other evidence to show that whilst it represents an advancement of the NIWC's aims, a gender neutral interpretation by policy-makers has undermined the strategic re-direction of the women's movement. A core part of this new equality framework was the then

innovative Section 75, which was to serve as the standard bearer of legislating for equality in the Agreement. Section 75's introduction marked a high point in efforts by the Women's Coalition and others to place equality (beyond a narrow ethnonational interpretation) at the heart of the new consociational governance arrangement. Interview material recognised this transformative turn, yet interviewees expressed frustration with a gender neutral interpretation of the legislation which undermines its potential for positive policy impact for women and gender equality. As such, Section 75 represents the culmination of a successful phase for the women's movement (via its party political representatives in the NIWC) in achieving the creation of equality tools, but equally marks the beginning of a subsequent period of watering down the legislation's potential for real impact through the application by policy-makers of a gender neutral lens (which will be further explored in the next chapter).

Section 75 in the Northern Ireland Act states that (Northern Ireland Act, 1998):

A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity—

- (a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- (b) between men and women generally;
- (c) between persons with a disability and persons without;
- and
- (d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

Donaghy has argued that Section 75 represents, 'one of the world's leading models of mainstreaming, promoting equality of opportunity among nine groups via the statutory duty of public authorities' (Donaghy, 2004: 398) and is resistant to alteration or minimisation due to consociational government and its inclusion in the Northern Ireland Act (ibid: 402). The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland was established (in Section 73 of the Act) to implement and oversee the Section 75 statutory duty; it is responsible for enforcing the duties of public authorities, including enforcing the production by the latter of equality schemes and ensuring that prior consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place; as well as publishing an annual report on implementation of the duty. It is this consultative aspect which leads Donaghy to conclude that, 'it appears that there is greater scope for gender, as opposed to just women's, perspectives to be considered in this mainstreaming process' (ibid: 400). It has not been without criticism in the women's movement:

People would say that within Section 75 there was created a gender-neutral policy-making environment...When I've got my Equality Commission hat on, I'm very cross with the women's sector who would accept that it was the case that it's in Section 75; it's not poor old Section 75's fault. We believe that the legislation is clear...we are quite clear about interpretation and misinterpretation of Section 75; and also I know the criticism that we get and I can see why that happens (Interview, Liz Law: 6 July 2011).

Avila Kilmurrary reflected on the impact that misconceptions and different ideological interpretations about Section 75 have had on the women's movement, particularly in relation to funding:

When...the whole issue around Section 75 of the equality considerations and seven categories came up, the emphasis seemed to flip from women in disadvantaged areas to equality between men and women. And a lot of civil servants were saying, oh well if you're doing that for women then we have to do that for men...And then there were those departments that would say – like DSD – well actually we're not about funding women's groups per se, we will fund groups working with women in disadvantaged areas. So it was almost then more of an anti-poverty analysis. So they have flipped between different analyses, and I think that is particularly prevalent at the moment in terms of funding that women's centres might have got for educational work for women – FE work. And now talking about education and learning and saying, well actually that should be done through the FE colleges. So they've almost lost out through a simplistic interpretation of mainstreaming (Interview: 18 July 2011).

Similarly, Ann Marie Gray recalled an experience of witnessing officials interpreting Section 75 in a manner that enables a gender neutral approach:

Eileen Sung arranged for us to do some workshops with the Equality Officers, so each department has got a couple of equality officers that work on Section 75...their take on equality was fascinating; I remember the education people saying 'well we couldn't do that because we have to treat boys and girls the same', so if you do this for this person then you have to do it for that person...That's probably a lack of confidence in how Section 75 should be used or it's just a kind of cynicism about it, or they don't really think it'll make a difference anyway...but they certainly didn't see that they had that much power or that they would use it like that' (Interview: 27 November 2012).

Moreover, a statutory duty for equality is only as strong as its enforcement mechanism. As Eileen Sung noted, 'the Equality Commission has no stick...in one particular judicial review [Justice Girvan] said basically "all that can happen if a Department doesn't fulfil its duties; it gets ticked off in the Assembly;" there are various reports to Ministers and Secretaries of State, but the ultimate sanction is public naming and shaming in the Assembly' (Interview: 28 June 2011). Members of the women's movement have therefore expressed a strong sense of frustration not with Section 75 as a mechanism for promoting equality in itself, but rather with the space that it gives to officials for a gender neutral interpretation in terms of implementation. In this way, despite representing a tool for gender equality advocacy and gender mainstreaming in the post-Agreement equality framework, the application of Section 75 has been marked by a gender neutral approach to policy and funding, which evidence in Chapter 4 will show to be endemic to policy-making in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, evidence shows that despite a strong system of equality mechanisms, the women's movement nonetheless found their new strategic direction challenged almost immediately by a centralised gender neutral rhetoric. In talking about the importance of the equality and human rights agenda as a frontline in the conflict and central tenet in the Agreement, Bronagh Hinds has alluded to the issue of flawed implementation and advocated for civil society leadership in promoting this agenda in the face of a backlash from policy-



makers and implementers, 'when you look at the big power-brokers in the implementation of the Agreement, what they do is they continue to look after their own interests, and those marginal interests...have been less looked after; and yet those are the ones that will actually deepen the peace and actually bed it in.' She argued that it is incumbent upon civil society to, 'ensure and give leadership that that agenda is an agenda for all of the people, both sides of the community...and is not owned by one side or the other' (Hinds: 2010a).

The implications of gender neutral implementation for producing gender neutral policies and legislation were highlighted by Hinds in this speech, with the example of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration agenda, 'all of these policies are framed without actually looking at the specifics of different needs...particularly the fact that women are actually the majority in this community and get so little attention when they have given so much' (ibid). Therefore, the context of a constraining environment which narrows the scope of equality mechanisms for advancing gender equality impacts on the women's movement's ability to advance their agenda. Chapter 5 will explore in detail the ways in which the movement engages with and seeks to counter the gender neutral agenda.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the Women's Coalition failed to recreate its bridging ties at the political level because the commonality of women's experiences did not extend to the constitutional question, preventing the replication of these ties in the Assembly. Interview material has supported this judgement, and further, has suggested that the Coalition was unable to maintain a shared vision of its purpose and direction following initial successes. However, this chapter has shown that the Women's Coalition has had a lasting impact on the women's movement; charting the continuation of the bridging ties that brought it together and analysing how these ties have been deployed in the Coalition's aftermath to enable the women's movement to adapt and re-strategise to a transformed landscape of equality legislation in the post-Northern Ireland Act environment. Whilst evidence from NIWC members provides conflicting accounts of the Coalition's response to electoral failure, it has shown that leading members emphasised the ways in which the NIWC influenced policy indirectly and saw aspects of their agenda adopted by other parties. As Ann Hope observed, 'there's a legacy. It didn't just die off, there was a legacy in terms of politicising women, politicising the electorate, giving a kick up the arse to political parties to say women matter, women are electable and you need to think about that' (Interview: 28 June 2011). It is this judgement of success which allowed the NIWC to interpret the dismantling of the party in ways that spurred renewed action, and which former Coalition members carried forward and operationalised into a new strategy.

Cowell-Meyers argues that the Coalition was formed because, 'what concrete policy goals the movement possessed would not be translated into policy if some member of their group was not present to advocate for them. They needed to be made present and the system of representation had failed them in this sense' (2014: 65). The failure to see goals translated into policy through the agency of inside political actors necessitated fundamental strategic change to ensure presence within a system which did not sustain women's organised political voices. To establish policy influence, emphasis was deliberately placed on leadership of a highly-networked movement through the development of bridging mechanisms to facilitate shared, collective actions and goals, and to enable the development of linking ties to policy-

makers. This required a strategic re-direction away from the unitary ideology of the Women's Coalition, in favour of a more flexible system that seeks consensus on an issue-specific basis. Central to the success of this strategy is the influence of leadership agency – core individuals who instigate and lead meetings, shape policy output, and act as primary representatives for larger networks and on particular issues. The role of leadership agency in activating communally-held social capital in a social movement and maintaining highly-networked structures will be explored in the following chapters, and is an important point of consideration in the study of social capital and social movements.

Whilst this has been a creative strategy to overcome the Coalition's failure and recognise the women's movement's heterogeneity, tensions remain and do not seem to be effectively resolved in structures like the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group beyond a process of self-exclusion by particular groups and a degree of gate-keeping by movement leaders. Nevertheless, this new strategy does successfully create shared platforms around particular issues and uses the strong bridging ties located in these structures to assert policy influence. The following chapter will explore the impact of conflict within the movement and engagement with the Government's social capital agenda in destabilising this, at times, tenuous consensus. However, there is a high degree of agreement amongst those women's movement leaders who are active in strategic mechanisms like the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group that they are consensus-driven and facilitate the advancement of their agenda.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Strategic engagement: the development of linking social capital with the Northern Ireland Government**

#### **1. Introduction**

The previous chapter assessed how the failure of the Women's Coalition was constructed and 'narrated' within the movement, in order to facilitate the transition away from formal political engagement as a party and develop a new strategy as a movement based on establishing linking ties in order to maintain policy influence. The chapter built upon evidence from scholars and engaged leaders to show a more nuanced picture for the Coalition's failure, encompassing the entrenchment of ethnonational politics which marginalised the Women's Coalition's cross-community approach, and the lack of a shared, coherent vision amongst Women's Coalition members for its future direction. It explored the post-Women's Coalition transition; how the women's movement has internalised the experience of formal politics to continue efforts towards the achievement of its aims, and how its bridging ties are expressed outside the structures of a political party. Evidence showed that in order to influence policy, the women's movement has developed a more flexible system that seeks consensus on an issue-specific basis and which relies on the influence of leadership agency, in which core individuals lead meetings, shape policy output and act as representatives for the movement.

The creation of a new strategy, which relies upon a highly-networked and flexible system underpinned by key leaders, raises the following research question: having established certain structures to effect strategic re-direction, has the women's movement subsequently mobilised its bridging links by politically engaging as a collective with policy-makers (via linking social capital)? This chapter will address and analyse the processes and mechanisms established by the Northern Ireland government and/or the women's movement to facilitate policy consultation and influence; and seek to determine whether the movement has achieved greater influence by deploying a strategy of seeking and mobilising linking ties with the Government. This will be situated in the context of the Government's own social capital agenda; a policy narrative dominated by ethnonational relations. Moreover, this chapter will interrogate further the role and agency of leaders, and consider the implications of the inherent fragility of a movement which relies upon core individuals to buoy this highly-networked structure in terms of the movement's ability to influence policy.

#### **2. The relevance of linking social capital in a Northern Ireland context**

This chapter will discuss the post-Women's Coalition transition in the context of a government agenda that is shaped by a social capital rhetoric. Social capital, as resources embedded in social networks that are accessed or mobilised through ties in the networks, has found favour with policy-makers generally, and in Northern Ireland in particular, by representing an asset at the community level that can be developed as a productive force. An exploration of the women's movement's post-NIWC transition will be situated within a social capital theoretical framework as an effective means of conceptualising the re-positioning of the women's movement in the aftermath of the Women's Coalition. This will facilitate an analysis of whether and how the movement adapted its ties both internally and in relation to

government. Moreover, it is a useful framework in light of the Government's own social capital agenda and the subsequent implications for the women's movement.

As outlined in Chapter 2, a definition of social capital which emphasises networks within, between and beyond communities, must not blind us to the institutional context within which these networks are embedded, especially the role of the State. As such, the vibrancy or paucity of social capital cannot be understood independently of its broader institutional environment (Woolcock, 2001: 4). That is, whilst bonding and bridging social capital do indeed allow for the maintenance and creation of valuable ties of trust and reciprocity among networks, without links to institutions such resources may have little influence over institutional decision-making processes and outcomes. Whilst outcomes are not being assessed in the context of this study, routes to influence in the policy-making process by the women's movement are a critical matter for consideration. Chapter 4's exploration of the post-NIWC women's movement showed how it has re-formed and re-affirmed its bridging ties to present a coherence and unity in the aftermath of the Women's Coalition, setting out how it has deployed these bridging ties to facilitate linking ties with the Government.

This chapter will therefore consider whether the women's movement has succeeded in encouraging the Northern Ireland government to broaden its agenda to include gender equality. As will be shown, any engagement by the women's movement with the Government comes in the context of an environment in which social capital is central to the latter's good relations agenda, and forging linking ties is not only key to securing avenues of influence for the women's movement, but equally to ensuring access to funding. Interview material will therefore be used to show the extent to which the movement, having established strong bridging ties characterised by various networks that rely upon the agency of key leaders, has turned this capital into linking ties to policy-makers. Moreover, as a social movement with a demonstrably high level of bridging networks but tenuous access to secure funding in the face of a strong and constraining government agenda, note will be taken of evidence that suggests discord both within the movement, and in its relations with the Government.

Scholars have demonstrated the utility of social capital theory for understanding the role of the voluntary sector, and its relationship with the State. Bayat has argued that the capacity of the community to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions outside and beyond the community is a key function of linking social capital (Bayat, 2005: 9), and in turn, the State has much to gain from cultivating meaningful ties. Indeed, policy-makers have become increasingly interested in social capital because, as Hancock et al have noted in relation to Westminster governments, 'community has been the 'go to' concept placed at the centre of the current government's welfare and social wellbeing narratives' (Hancock, Mooney and Neal, 2012: 344); a concept with the sufficient 'plasticity' and resilience to render it attractive to policy-makers irrespective of political affiliation. The authors note that under New Labour, the notion of community allowed a discourse of social capital and nonstate-based responsibility for social well-being to manifest in a raft of policy initiatives and interventions, and reinforced by a neo-liberal agenda, endeavoured to secure social cohesion and welfare policy and delivery through localised co-operation and highly managed forms of social capital (ibid: 346-347).

For feminist scholars, the theory's focus on the community has problematic implications, but also offers a route for conceptualising women's collective civic organisation and activism. Scholars, by exposing the 'disciplining discourse' of invisibility to women's political citizenship that has characterised social capital theory (Lowndes, 2006: 216), have

nevertheless shown the extent to which social capital has something important to reveal about women's community organising and interaction with the State. In the Northern Ireland context, in which political rhetoric has long been dominated by the constitutional debate (and since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, additionally by the good relations agenda) at the expense of social policy, it is especially true that the activities, values and ways of thinking which have been associated with women are considered to be outside and irrelevant to the political world of citizenship (Susan James in Lowndes, 2000: 535).

In this sense, it may be argued that citizenship in the prevailing political climate is measured by engagement with politics according to this design, and political legitimacy for formal engagement – as seen by the hostility with which the allegedly 'illegitimate' Women's Coalition were met – comes from proven engagement with ethnonational politics, with a resultant under-emphasis on social policy. This has been underpinned, as Horgan and Gray assert, 'by neo-liberal economics and populist rhetoric...Media coverage and discussion has endorsed the priority government has accorded to economic and business issues at the expense of the debates and scrutiny of social policy' (Horgan and Gray, 2012: 474). They argue that the principle of shared government has reduced occasions of collective responsibility in policy-making, with government ministers often adopting communal interests. The authors show that this failure to collaborate has particularly affected social policy, with very limited implementation of existing high-level strategies on, among others, gender equality, and the failure to develop a childcare strategy of any kind. The resulting impasse has resulted in Northern Ireland's once leading equality legislation lagging behind that of England, Wales and Scotland (Horgan and Gray, 2012: 469-470).

The Government's disregard for social policy therefore means that social capital theory's ability to uncover the political participation of women in the voluntary sphere offers a real contribution both to feminist scholarship about gender and political participation, and to scholarship about governance in a post-Peace Agreement Northern Ireland. Therefore, the limited attention given to social policy in Northern Ireland means that a feminist social capital approach has much to offer; not least because the women's movement's extensive engagement with social policy is, in effect, meeting both a generalised state indifference and more specific social capital agenda that prioritises sectarian reconciliation as both the source and end goal of social capital. Feminist critics have engaged with social capital theory and argued that its blindness to gender reflects gendered notions about citizenship: civic and political participation tends to replicate the public/private binary, with women's civic participation inclining towards the assumption of a more informal nature that has been overlooked by social capital theorists.

Chapter 2 noted that women's networks are likely to be qualitatively different from male networks, with women tending to belong to networks that rely more on time and non-monetised labour exchanges, rather than networks centred on economic advantage (Adkins, 2005: 200). Scholars have nevertheless asserted that such networks are equally facilitative of a route to political engagement; that traditional masculinist definitions overlook women's sometime unorthodox routes to political engagement, occurring through, for instance, engagement at the grassroots level as a starting point for wider political activism. Rather, by looking into the 'smaller democracies' of women's associational behaviour (Lowndes, 2004), one can discern their hidden (as far as traditional analyses are concerned) social capital, and emphasise that this capital can be and indeed is being converted into political engagement. This wider analysis therefore makes visible the different, gender-specific 'circuits' of social

capital that 'capitalise' political engagement in different ways (Lowndes, 2004: 49), and offers the opportunity to uncover women-specific organisation that leads to engagement with the policy-making process.

Chapter 3 outlined the ways in which this has been characteristic of the Northern Ireland women's movement, suggesting that there is value in conceptualising the movement as a network with the potential for the accrual of social capital. However, the general disregard of social capital theory for more female-centred forms of activism and organisation is further exacerbated in a Northern Irish context, in which 'community', with its equation to sectarian affiliation, carries heavier social and political implications than the 'depoliticised governance versions of community' attested to by Hancock et al (2012: 359). Nevertheless, the embedded rhetorical power of community in Northern Ireland means that 'community' can be reconfigured to fit into the Government's social cohesion agenda, or more specifically in the case of Northern Ireland, the good relations agenda. As such, a governmental social capital agenda conceptualises its utility as a tool for ameliorating conditions between the two 'communities.' Gender, in this context, is outside the bounds of 'community', and the accrual of social capital amongst and between women's groups does not offer solutions to an issue rooted in ethnonationalism. Interviews with members of the women's movement sought to explore this context, and establish whether women's organisations are being overlooked for their ability to generate social capital and struggle to capitalise upon their linking ties in order to gender government policies.

### **3. The Northern Ireland government's social capital agenda**

The good relations strategy has at its centre an interpretation of social capital that is tailored to Northern Ireland and the narrative of 'community.' This has been elaborated in government documents, which outline its perceived specific utility to the Northern Irish context. These include *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* (OFMDFM, 2005), *The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (OFMDFM, 2010) and *Together: Building a United Community* (OFMDFM, 2013b). In a report commissioned by OFMDFM to study the development of diversity and equality indicators in Northern Ireland, the authors note that there is a general acknowledgement that Northern Ireland has, 'a higher degree of social cohesion than other regions in the UK and a significant community infrastructure' (Buchanan, McDade and Jamison, 2007: 38). It can therefore be posited that the theory of social capital has had potential appeal for policy-makers in Northern Ireland by incorporating these qualities as necessary precursors for the development of bonding, bridging and linking social capital.

As Chapter 3 discussed, social capital has increasingly featured at the core of the Government's good relations narrative, both a policy language and formal policy-making Unit within OFMDFM that mediates the Government's relationship with the community sector and has equally saturated the latter's internal and external operation. Chapter 3 made reference to a DSD toolkit document, *Toolkit to Measure the Added Value of Community and Voluntary Based Activity*, which uses the concept of social capital to assess the added value of the community and voluntary sector on local development (DSD, 2006). This document demonstrates the centrality of social capital to the Government's relationship with the voluntary sector: 'Government is committed to the application of the indicators in any funding arrangements with voluntary and community organisations...The social capital indicators will

supplement the conventional measures of economy, efficiency, equity and effectiveness' (DSD, 2006: 3). Moreover, this document ties funding for the voluntary sector directly to the generation of social capital, stating that the funded activity's impact on local social capital should be measured, 'and that positive impacts on social capital should be recognised and rewarded. By definition, community-based projects that make no contribution to the development of local social capital would be less eligible for funding' (ibid: 5).

This embedding of social capital in the Government's good relations agenda is further seen in the flagship *A Shared Future – Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* document: 'Good community relations policy, and its outworking, is the search for the practical foundations of trust between all people in Northern Ireland who have been divided on the basis of perceived political, cultural, religious, class or ethnic background' (OFMDFM, 2005: 4). That is, good relations is conceived in sectarian terms; with the solution, it may be inferred, equally located in resolving sectarian divisions and inequalities. Indeed, it is conceded that whilst some consultation respondents had expressed concern that the document does not take into account many of the Section 75 categories (gender, disability, sexual orientation and so on), the new good relations policy, 'aims to address particular manifestations of community division between the Section 75 (2) categories – persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group' (OFMDFM, 2005: 62). Within this formulation, it is recognised that, 'the voluntary and community sector has made a powerful contribution to the achievement of better relations between communities', and that resourcing the sector will help with the, 'development of and investment in, social capital – particularly bridging capital – through community development [which] can help promote relationship building within and between communities' (ibid: 55). Therefore, voluntary organisations have a role to play in the good relations agenda in so far as they contribute to fostering collaboration between communities divided along religious, political or racial lines.

Such policy documents demonstrate the Government's will to structure relations with the voluntary sector through the good relations framework. A key part of this narrative is the understanding that the voluntary and community sector is part of the service provision arrangement. This is clearly stated in the 2013 *Together: Building a United Community* Strategy, developed as an implementation tool for the 2011-2015 Programme for Government, 'building capacity across our community and developing the all important social capital within our society requires continued investment by not only Government but also our community partners' (OFMDFM, 2013b: 83). The Ministerial Foreword sets out the good relations agenda at the core of the Strategy, 'a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation. It provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation', to be implemented through, 'major new cross-community initiatives around education, housing, sport, youth volunteering and interface barriers' (ibid: 1-2).

The good relations agenda seeks to tackle sectarianism by building bridging social capital through cross-community solutions that are delivered by the voluntary sector. In practical terms, this agenda as set out in the *Together* Strategy will be delivered by voluntary organisations through the Central Good Relations Funding Programme 2014/15: 'The programme will support productive, time bound projects which contribute to the promotion of good relations... Essential Criteria - The extent to which the project contributes to the promotion of good relations and to building a united and shared community, and associated

Ministerial priorities aimed at building a united, shared and reconciled community as identified in the good relations strategy' (OFMDFM, 2013c: 3). The money available constitutes project funding to develop and deliver projects in line with the funding criteria outlined (ibid: 4); as such, core costs which could provide greater financial stability to applicant organisations are not eligible.

The clear message, then, is that government funding schemes for the voluntary sector are expected to deliver the good relations agenda; expressed in a Strategy which by the Government's own admission in its Equality Impact Assessment will have only a 'minor' impact on equality of opportunity for women affected by this policy, 'the high level policy aims of the Strategy will be aimed at the S75(2) categories [promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group], the S75(1) categories will [be] impacted on but only in so far as gender is a multiple identity category' (OFMDFM, 2013d: 6). That is, the good relations strategy does not consider gender as a stand-alone indicator of good relations, nor as a category to be specifically addressed as a means of improving community relations.

#### **4. Women's movement engagement with the Government's social capital agenda and formal mechanisms for linking ties**

This section draws upon interview evidence and policy documents to address the ways in which the women's movement has responded to the Government's social capital agenda and sought to establish linking ties within a good relations policy context, analysing the mechanisms for linking to policy-makers and some of the difficulties and tensions that this engagement brings. The minimisation of gender seen in the *Together* strategy, in which gender is subsumed into and seen to be at the service of a larger good relations narrative, is exhibited elsewhere by the Northern Ireland government. As Paula Bradley MLA noted: 'The willingness to proceed to a peaceful solution to the conflict saw the commitment made to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making in the Belfast Agreement being ignored, and the reality that equality in decision making structures would be based on the political and sectarian divide', with new institutional mechanisms being under-resourced or little encouraged to pursue gender equality goals (NIA APG 1325, 2014: 7).

In reflections following the UK government's CEDAW Examination at the UN in July 2013, Emma Patterson-Bennett alluded to women's movement disquiet at this larger agenda at play even on a highly visible international stage, in which the sole representative at the Examination from Northern Ireland was the (male) Director of the Good Relations Division: 'Regardless of whether you think it's good that they sent someone from the Good Relations Unit for an equality for women [examination]...let's not even go there!' (Interview: 10 December 2013). Eileen Sung pointed to the implications of this strictly cross-community social capital agenda for the women's movement, 'in a report that I prepared for internal use within government on funding for the women's sector...there wasn't one department that said 'we fund the women's sector because they express women's needs and because they are the women's sector.' It was all to do with the functionality of the sector, what do they deliver; delivering services in the community' (Interview: 28 June 2011). There is therefore a strong emphasis on delivery, and in the context of the good relations agenda, this delivery relates to fostering bridging links across the community divide.



A concern for rationalisation is at the core of the good relations narrative and service provision imperative. As Ann Marie Gray argued, 'there's always been this thing about oh they need to be more rationalised, they need to be united, they need to speak with one voice, when no other sector would really be expected to speak with one voice. That's the expectation from government; they want somebody they can come to' (Interview: 27 November 2012). A government rationale of service provision, where the service to be provided is meeting the needs of the good relations strategy, has brought an expectation of a single, 'manageable' women's movement with which to consult. However, this has impacted negatively on the creation of meaningful linking social capital. Whilst the Government does exhibit a strong desire to consult the women's movement, as Lynn Carvill observed, 'the Government are proactively seeking the views of women on women's issues, on gender' (Interview: 27 November 2012), there is little commitment shown to ensuring its sustainability.

In reference to the Government's mapping exercise described above by Eileen Sung, Lynn Carvill continued that,

If it could ever be used to impact in a negative fashion, it'll be used. It started off as a very negative undertaking because it was about funding, and none of that has ever been resolved, in fact it's just got worse and shifted in different ways. So they've tried to map something...I'm actually not really sure what has come from it. I mean, time is spent on it and then it's kind of shelved...That only came out in August, it was put out and put on the website; [then] it was buried...then somebody came across it and sent it around (ibid).

This therefore points to the absence of a constructive, strategic discussion between government and the women's movement about the latter's sustainability, based on an understanding of the movement's contribution to social and political life in Northern Ireland. As such, whilst the mechanisms for engagement and consultation do exist, reluctance from the Government to help develop a financially secure women's movement that is able to meet its service provision requirements (let alone advocate for women's equality outside the funding arrangements set down by the Government) suggests that linking social capital exists at a superficial level, and even that it largely serves the Government agenda – as the quote from Eileen Sung indicates - at the expense of the long-term security of, and policy gains for, the women's movement.

However, the entrenching of the good relations narrative in the social policy landscape is such that social capital as the theoretical core of the good relations agenda has become embedded in the language of the voluntary sector itself. In its 2011 policy manifesto, NICVA calls on politicians and parties to, 'recognise the importance of local community development organisations to building social capital, regenerating communities, fostering social inclusion and linking disadvantaged communities to information and services' (NICVA, 2011). Further, alongside government and community organisations, social capital has become a crucial framework for large non-state funders. The Director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI), which supports community and voluntary action through project funding, states that the CFNI, 'employ a social capital assessment framework to be placed alongside an examination of other key community development indicators' (Kilmurray, 2006). The need to foster bridging social capital between communities, in particular, as part of the

community sector's work is inbuilt into the funding process across the range of institutions that support their programmes.

The good relations agenda is a leading example of the post-Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, consociational political landscape, in which equality between the two communities is legally enshrined and mediated through statutory agencies and government departments. For the women's movement, this political narrative represents a challenge to their *modus operandi*. Murtagh argues that whilst consociation represents a singular focus on competing national factions and constitutional disputes, 'the women's movement has often displayed alternative assumptions and employed radically different means in striving towards a more peaceful, democratic society.' That is, the transversal women's movement espouses a form of democracy distinct from that conventionally seen in formal politics. Murtagh maintains that whilst the consociational institutions offer insufficient space for the movement to engage, the movement does have enough civic space in the informal arena (Murtagh, 2008: 22). However, with the good relations agenda increasingly present in the civic realm, underpinned by an emphasis on bridging social capital between Protestant and Catholic communities and tied to voluntary sector funding, the civic space afforded to the women's movement has become more constricted and has impacted on the movement's strategies.

As explored in Chapter 3, whilst cross-community work has long been a feature of women's group activities, the imperative for this to be the foundation of grassroots or voluntary sector work has impacted on a movement for whom the empowerment of women is the primary focus of work. As Margaret Ward noted at a meeting run by the outgoing Women's National Commission (WNC) Northern Ireland Commissioner on the re-positioning of the women's movement following the decision to abolish the WNC, and at which I was present as WNC International Policy Advisor, 'it is hard to get funding for any projects in Northern Ireland if there is no obvious good relations element' (13 December 2010). That is, cross-community work is an essential component of securing state funding. Margaret Ward pointed elsewhere to an example of the ways in which the need to deploy the social capital narrative has impacted on the women's movement: 'We did a short report on the women's centres and I wrote it in a social capital framework...because we're resourced by the Government to be part of the Women's Centre Regional Partnership [WCRP]. VCU<sup>2</sup> were saying that they're always wanting us to demonstrate the work of the women's centres in terms of the wider community around them; it's not enough to be working with women' (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Avila Kilmurray reiterated this drive from government to see rationalisation of the women's movement which has come from greater engagement of the movement with the State's agenda, '[what] we're being faced...with over the past 5 years is our government departments telling us that there's far too many groups. Now that seems to fly completely in the face of your Big Society. They're looking for rationalisation' (Interview: 18 July 2011). Indeed, Eileen Sung held up the WCRP as an exemplar of women's movement successful engagement with the Government agenda, 'WCRP appears after successive evaluations of their funding to have delivered the services that government wanted around providing support for community groups and organisations, enhancing and increasing the professionalisation of community groups and organisations, and generally delivering accountability and value for money' (Interview: 28 June 2011). Government logic clearly emphasises rationalisation and

---

<sup>2</sup> Voluntary and Community Unit of the Department for Social Development

professionalisation of women's groups into fewer and more generalised structures which can deliver its agenda.

This suggests that 'selling' the work of the women's movement as social capital at work – as the Government understands it – is crucial to securing their support. Margaret Ward described a case in which a women's group chose to opt out of government funding process in order to protect the nature of its work:

They took a conscious decision not to go for funding because what they do is community development work in their area, and that's called 'single-identity work' in our good relations speak. Single-identity work only gets funded if there's a rationale and will move on to cross-community work, and single-identity work would have to be with really low-capacity, marginalised Protestant communities or something, women wouldn't be seen in that way (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Therefore, the good relations narrative is dominated by the drive to increase bridging social capital between Protestant and Catholic communities; working with women from one community is not inherently valued within this system, and seemingly women as a group are not conceptualised as a marginalised community in their own terms. Indeed, even asserting a women-centred approach in this doctrine proves difficult given that, 'when they're talking about community relations they're talking about men' (Interview, Lynn Carvill: 27 November 2012). Further, Margaret Ward argued that the impact of conforming to the good relations criteria on work undertaken by women's groups for women can be detrimental:

The Rural Women's Network for example are all surviving because they're doing peace work; what they're saying is the actual infrastructure that the rural women had is crumbling because none of them are doing that basic development work; they're doing peace-building work which is not the same. So they're coming together to develop story-telling, books of reminiscences, which has its place, but brings in a small group of women and all of the others and all the issues that they might want to be working on in rural communities fall by the wayside (Interview: 28 June 2011).

The implication, then, is that women's groups have the choice between adapting their programmes to incorporate a good relations aspect based on promoting bridging social capital across the community divide, which may not help to meaningfully alleviate the marginalisation and inequality of women in Northern Ireland; or to eschew government funding entirely. Nevertheless, Margaret Ward argued that the women's centres have largely managed to fulfil the good relations requirements; being based in 'single-identity' communities due to the nature of their work, but, 'they twin with each other and I think are able to leverage more. They obviously have to work separately but they come together for things. They've been quite adept at getting some money' (Interview: 28 June 2011). As Patricia Haren noted, among the women's centres there has always been, 'a big emphasis on cross-community work; so it didn't matter where you were from, the conflict went on around us but the women always worked cross-community and across the divide' (Interview: 5 July 2011).

Despite the practice of working cross-community, she recalled the difficulties that the women's centres have had withstanding calls to reduce the women-only focus, 'because over

the years they say well if you want funding become a family centre – if you want funding become this or that and we resisted’ (ibid). For Patricia Haren, then, the women’s centres have been delivering a good relations dividend by the very nature of their work that has simultaneously withstood bowing to the Government’s agenda. As Eleanor Jordan, Coordinator of the Windsor Women’s Centre, noted: ‘All Women’s Centres have promoted gender equality and good relations and have pushed boundaries in our work at local level and in areas of high disadvantage’ (WRDA, 2007: 24). The work of women’s centres therefore shows a willingness to engage with the good relations agenda and, in effect, market their work within this agenda to leverage more resources.

Nevertheless, even when providing evidence of the kinds of bridging social capital called for by the good relations agenda, women-only work continues to be under-valued by policy-makers for its potential contribution and is little acknowledged in government strategy. To interrogate this absence of gender, the WRDA held a conference in 2007 to address the issue that gender had been largely absent from the *A Shared Future* (ASF; the policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland, launched in 2005) discourse, and to strategically influence the review process: ‘As a participatory event it was intended both to affirm good practice and to offer a challenge to both the women’s sector and the community relations field to explore the gender dimension to good relations and the ‘shared future’ agenda’ (WRDA, 2007: 9). The report concluded that, ‘whilst there is mention of the work of women’s organisations in ASF, there is no commitment to tackling sexism and violence against women alongside the commitment to challenging sectarianism and racism...women strongly advocate seizing the new policy opportunities presented by the review of ASF through adopting and resourcing actions around UN Resolution 1325’ (ibid: 34). There is therefore clear evidence of the women’s movement engaging critically and proactively with the Government’s social capital agenda, in order to address and ameliorate a clear gender neutral policy direction.

However, evidence shows that this engagement with the good relations agenda by the women’s movement has not influenced the Government in developing a more gender-aware social capital agenda. Margaret Ward described the process of trying to engage with government on a key piece of good relations policy, the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) (2010): ‘Government had a draft strategy out...it was really appalling.’ She explained that the civil servant leading on the Programme appeared at a Good Relations Forum, co-convened by the Equality Commission and the CRC, ‘he said just before the Strategy came out that there would also be a series of consultations with key stakeholder groups – ex-combatants, victims, youth; and I said are you going to be speaking to women? And he just looked at me like I was stupid...even after it was said, he could have said I’ll go back, just to fob me off for then – but no, it was total resistance’ (Interview: 30 November 2012). The WRDA took action to combat this governmental unwillingness to take a gendered approach by securing money from the CRC for a consultation with women.

Writing in *Open Democracy*, Margaret Ward noted that women’s contribution during the Troubles to the maintenance of society was ignored: ‘So also was any indication that women had a role in the future development of a more peaceful society...There has been little meaningful response to this [consultation]. While a new strategy, *Together Building a United Community* has been released, which mentions the existence of the Gender Equality Strategy, the reference to women is merely tokenism’ (Ward, 2013). The result of this pervasive blindness to gender in the good relations policy narrative is a document (*Programme*

*for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration*) with no direct consideration of the role of women, women's voluntary and community organisations or a gendered analysis of any kind in the CSI programme. As Margaret Ward made clear, therefore, engagement in linking structures like the Gender Advisory Panel has done little to broaden the Government's social capital agenda to include a willingness to consider the role of gender in promoting good relations, nor more broadly to expand the notion of good relations beyond sectarian relations.

Similarly, in their consultation response to the 2011-2015 Programme for Government, the WCRP noted that whilst it welcomes the Executive's efforts towards a strong and shared community, 'WCRP is disappointed that no reference has been made of the role of women and women's community based organisations in promoting good relations...WCRP urges the Executive to ensure women are fully recognised in this priority and to recognise the role of women's community based organisations in promoting good relations through their services' (WCRP, 2012: 12). As seen in the previous chapter, collective endeavours such as the WCRP and Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group are examples of an attempt by the women's movement to maintain a shared focus on policy aims for women by creating consensus on an issue-by-issue basis; as seen here, they are doing so in the context of a cross-community narrative that does not consider work to address equality for women to fit good relations requirements, and is not acknowledged within this narrative as elaborated in foundational Executive policy commitments like the Programme for Government.

Therefore, whilst some organisations have been able to engage productively with the good relations agenda, others within the women's movement have, at best, an ambivalent relationship with the Government's social capital approach and have not managed to extend its scope to meaningfully incorporate greater gender awareness. The persistence of a gender neutral approach, combined with an emphasis on good relations that is almost wholly concerned with bridging ties between Protestant and Catholic communities, works to circumscribe the terms of political debate and limit the grounds upon which women's groups can seek funding for core work focused on social, political and economic conditions for women and assert influence in the policy-making process. As Bronagh Hinds argued, the issue with increasing levels of social capital in relation to women is the lack of understanding about the gendered aspects of policy-making:

The big problem here with bridging is not with the community and voluntary sector...it is about the policy aspect across government. It's nothing short of a disgrace on gender...We have one and a half people at most, but probably not even that, working in government on gender in OFMDFM. Plus an eighth of people who are equality officers in the various departments. And we're talking about gender not just in a normalised society like the rest of the UK, but a society which should be living to those democratic standards and has difficult conflict issues to address (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Participation in the process of policy-making by giving evidence at Committee Hearings, contributing to departmental consultations and financial and advisory support from government therefore suggests a relationship that affords the opportunity for input and collaboration, but overwhelmingly on the Government's terms. This is further evident from the Gender Advisory Panel, an arrangement in which women's movement leaders (particularly those from membership/umbrella organisations which serve a key policy generating function,

seen in Figure 2), along with members of the men's rights movement, the Equality Commission and others, meet with civil servants and Ministers to advise on departmental gender action plans to inform the Gender Equality Strategy. Eileen Sung judged that, 'I do think that the Gender Advisory Panel is a great example of where the sector has influenced government to do what it really wanted' (Interview: 28 June 2011). In her view, therefore, this is a clear example of structures which enable input and influence to the women's movement at the centre of the policy-making process.

However, Margaret Ward describes it as, 'an extremely frustrating arena to be in because it's very carefully corralled by the civil servants; you don't get documents beforehand, you get them there and you have to hand them back...it's always structured and mediated so you don't have proper conversation' (Interview: 28 June 2011). She suggested that there is inadequate understanding and reciprocity from the civil servants responsible for this mechanism, 'we don't want an adversarial relationship, we want to work with the civil servants to improve, to get them to think, so it would be most helpful if we could meet one department at a time and have the conversations – that's not hard to understand. But it's never happened...they don't know how to run it' (ibid). Moreover, Bronagh Hinds noted the failure of departments to develop their equality policy competence as a result of engagement with the Gender Advisory Panel:

I kicked up a stink about the Department of the Environment's Gender Action Plan. The letter came back from the DoE saying that they didn't think this had anything to do with them and they had nothing to contribute in terms of an action plan...then when they finally got the message, you know what they put in as a target? That they would become more aware of their own women in local councils initiative. No outcomes, no contribution, no nothing (Interview: 28 June 2011).

Margaret Ward's comments about participation in the Good Relations Forum highlights another arena in which an invitation to consult has produced negligible outcomes in terms of advancing a gendered awareness in policy-making:

To that would come...the representative from OFMDFM who was charged with bringing forward the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy...He would come along in this really civil servant complacent way and give us the update on where the CSI Strategy was going and what was happening with the consultations and then with the responses. During this period he said they would be having targeted consultations with key stakeholders like young people, ex-combatants and he named a few other groups. And I said 'will you be consulting with women?' and he just looked at me like 'what are you talking about?' And you could see he wasn't going to do it because he said 'oh we could think about that I suppose'...he didn't get it and when he came back at the next meeting and gave a breakdown of the consultation responses he didn't include women's response (Interview, Margaret Ward: 28 June 2011).

The implication here is that the reciprocity of meaningful dialogue and policy outcomes which would characterise effective linking social capital is absent; members of the women's movement contribute time and expertise to the forums that are made available to them by the

Government, but do not see reciprocal gains in terms of the advancement of their objectives. Even Eileen Sung qualified her positive view about the Gender Advisory Panel, with comments indicating that such mechanisms are viewed as tools primarily for delivering government's objectives, 'at the time of the review of the Gender Equality Strategy, I think it will be very important to review the terms of reference and role of the Gender Advisory Panel, and that's not to pre-judge that it will end up being disbanded or re-shaped...but I do think that it's important to allow everybody to re-visit what purpose does it serve' (Interview: 28 June 2011). Whilst there are structures enabling linking ties which are exploited by the women's movement as a route to input, it is once again clear that their continued existence depends on government belief in their instrumental value to delivering its agenda.

An additional structure acts as a linking mechanism to government, and also demonstrates the influence of the Government's agenda in shaping and, perhaps, constraining some organisations within the women's movement. In February 2012, the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) published the joint programme statement *Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas*. The programme aims to see, 'that women living in disadvantage in urban areas and women living in rural areas will be provided with the specialist support they require to enable them to tackle disadvantage and fulfil their potential in overcoming the barriers that give rise to their marginalisation, experience of poverty and exclusion' (DSD, 2013a: 3).

Women's organisations were surveyed about their needs in terms of regional support, and a specialist support programme for women's organisations across Northern Ireland, both urban and rural, has been established to serve the needs of marginalised and isolated women (DSD/DARD, 2012: 3). The result of this process is the Women's Regional Consortium, comprised of seven organisations: WRDA, Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN), Training for Women Network (TWN – Project Lead), WSN, NIRWN, WOMEN'S TEC and The Women's Centre Derry. The Consortium, 'will be the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas...The Consortium will ensure that there is a continuous two way flow of information between government and the sector', ascertaining and taking forward to policy-makers the views and needs of women in these areas (TWN, 2014).

Departmental guidance outlines a clear linking function for the Consortium, including to, 'influence emerging government policy relating to issues facing women from disadvantaged areas and rural areas' (DSD/DARD, 2012: 8). Unlike the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group, which has been entirely led by the women's movement and accepted by government as a stakeholder in policy development, this Consortium has been designed, formed and funded (following applications from organisations for membership) by government. As such, it has clear women's movement partners and clear channels for partners to engage with government. This can be seen in Figure 2, which also shows the link through to government via the Consortium for groups which are not direct partners but are members of organisations which are (for instance, the link from women's centres, to the WRDA, to the Consortium, to the Government). However, Margaret Ward explained the difficulties that complying with this framework brings, 'we're just at a time of terrible disarray within the sector because they did an open competition for expressions of interest, and in terms of women there were three competing ones...WRDA as the lead partner for a particular bid were given preferred bidder status, and then the Minister withdrew that because of what he perceived as lack of collaboration within the sector.'

She pointed to a wish from government for rationalisation of a diversity of women's organisations into larger blocs, 'what they ideally wanted was one organisation and ideally a whole load of mergers and it would just be easy for them in terms of paperwork...what they wanted from us was to go into this whole new consortium, even though we only have like 3 out of 11 posts involved in it...that was the civil servant-defined solution, it wasn't a women's sector-defined solution. So we resisted that and were seen as very bad girls indeed' (Interview: 30 November 2012). Nevertheless, leading organisations like the WRDA do engage in consortia which ostensibly act to represent women to government, support service delivery to women and generate policy. However, the ethos of such organisations, who are working elsewhere through mechanisms like the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group and Women's Budget Group to bring together the diversity of the movement for focused policy insights, seems to be at odds with a homogenising philosophy on the part of government.

It can therefore be concluded that leaders within the women's movement do not judge engagement with the Government's agenda to have been of benefit to furthering their aims, even when this agenda ostensibly matches the movement's own, as with the Gender Equality Strategy. Structures to link the movement into policy consultation provide a forum for engagement, but as Ann Marie Gray argued, 'in terms of influencing policy-making, because the policy-making is so jammed up anyway, it would be actually hard to identify.' She pointed to the Gender Equality Strategy as a possible success of engagement, but concluded that, 'the implementation of that was a disaster, and that's despite the Gender Advisory Panel and despite Margaret chipping away all the time and Lynn doing that as well' (Interview: 27 November 2012). As Eileen Sung's comments above indicate, this is at least in part because the Government's attitude towards women's movement engagement is fundamentally framed in terms of its functionality; its ability to deliver the Government's agenda.

In response to a central research question of this study: how has the women's movement responded to the Government's agenda of fostering social capital and has it succeeded in encouraging the Government to broaden this agenda to include gender equality, evidence indicates that the language of good relations and a rationale of relating to the women's movement through structures like consortia has so permeated political discourse and funding requirements that the women's movement has largely opted to engage with this agenda. As Margaret Ward noted, 'It has this complete language. When I first came here all our funding had run out and I just did funding application after funding application...To do the application you had to use it, so I would try to speed read my way into this. I realise now that I use all this language and I'm sort of institutionalised' (Interview: 28 June 2011). The women's movement has nonetheless not succeeded in facilitating an approach that meaningfully encompasses gender equality as a marker of fostering social capital and good relations. Indeed, whilst feminist scholars have uncovered the manner in which women's social capital can enable political engagement in engaged and meaningful ways, the Northern Ireland government's delimitation of social capital and its contribution to social and political life circumscribes the contribution of the women's movement.

## **5. The implications for the women's movement of engaging with the Government's agenda**

Margaret Ward's consideration of whether engagement with the Government's agenda has resulted in institutionalisation leads to a question about the implications of such an



approach for the movement and the advancement of its aims. In the Northern Ireland context, as argued above, the women's movement has worked with limited success to gender the good relations agenda and in so doing, has adopted to a degree its language and rationale. Interviewees described the difficulties of attempting to fit the Government's design in order to secure or maintain state funding. For instance, Margaret Ward explained the abortive efforts of the DSD to 'rationalise' their relationship as funder with women's infrastructure organisations, 'we were part of the Women's Centres Regional Partnership with four organisations. They [DSD] were giving us a lot of resources to have facilitated meetings to look at forming one organisation, and it just wasn't going to work' (Interview: 30 November 2012).

The onus on women's organisations who receive or are seeking government funding – or simply looking to be in favour with policy-makers and exert influence – to meet the conditions of the Government's agenda can mean that where such funds are limited and the operational doctrine favours 'rationalisation' of multiple actors, women's organisations find themselves in open competition. As Ann Marie Gray observed of one leading organisation, 'I think the funding situation has become tighter, they've started to muscle in on certain areas of work and not work particularly collegiately' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Kate McCullough argued that this competitive tendering for government funding changed the nature of the movement; describing a period of government funding in the mid-2000s, she noted that, 'WRDA shaped and changed itself when there was an opportunity for funding from within a department...That caused huge problems back in 2007 when that funding came into being, and that's when WRDA shifted themselves slightly differently...So there was this competitive thing that started...that we never had before' (Interview: 10 December 2013).

There is therefore debate amongst leaders in the movement about the impact of working to the Government's agenda (by receiving funding), whether it is an issue of co-option and use of government rhetoric, or the emergence of possible competitive tensions that come with limited government funds with particular conditions attached. Moreover, a key facet which emerged in interviews is the pivotal role of leaders who are seen by some to create or exacerbate this competitive environment. Ann Marie Gray referred to an organisation which is seen as an initiator of antagonism in the movement, 'they've been around for a long time, but they've sort of changed direction I suppose...it's partly personality to be honest. So there's not an easy personality and that's created problems in relationships' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Leaders are viewed as the key force in driving changes in direction and pursuing project funding which is seen to result in competitive tensions, as Kate McCullough described, 'the WRDA up until that time was specifically rural. All of a sudden they got a new Director, and in that Director changeover, that's when moving out [happened]. And there was some encroachment on NIWEP...I had to say I'm sorry, some of the work you're doing is NIWEP...The person who took over the WRDA at the time came from a background of one organisation leading [the sector/movement], and brought that culture' (Interview: 10 December 2013).

This competitive positioning for funding from and influence with government lends particular value to structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group created from within the movement to meet its needs, which bolster bridging ties across the movement and between leaders who may elsewhere be pitted in competition. As Margaret Ward observed, 'the Ad Hoc Policy Group – it doesn't come in to that at all, it really is about the issues; it's such a relief to go to that. There are a lot of different fora at the moment where those tensions are being played out and I don't know if they will be resolved' (Interview: 30 November 2012). The pressures that are placed on bridging ties in the attempt to conform to government's requirements

points to an inherent fragility in the network of the women's movement, in which leaders manage this balance based on personal relationships, mutual understandings and improvised arrangements. This can represent a real strength; allowing the movement to work through flexible structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group to respond rapidly to policy developments.

In the context of establishing linking ties to influence policy, this relies upon the positioning of key leaders in strategic roles within a highly networked structure, which in turn depends for its functionality on the ability of these individuals to work flexibly, reciprocally and through structures that are largely unfunded and so must be accommodated around other occupational commitments. However, the reliance on key leaders exposes the movement to breakdowns in relationships between individuals and the potential for over-reliance within organisations and structures on particular figures in the movement. Evidence above and in Chapter 4 indicate that policy-oriented, women's movement-driven structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group function effectively because the relationships between leaders are strong and complementary.

However, evidence here points to fault-lines developing when competition is introduced around funding and formal relationships to government at a single organisational level. As Eileen Sung observed, 'when people do discuss the tensions within the sector...it often splits down the normal small p political lines – which groups are seen to have the money and which groups aren't. And the barriers and rivalries to building that social capital tend to be, I believe, a mixture of those normal jealousies...and also the issue of strong personalities that can't get along with each other' (Interview: 28 June 2011). Competitive tensions between organisations in a context of squeezed public funding is not unexpected, and evidence above has shown that when women's organisations engage with government-funded endeavours like consortia, clashes about roles and personal disagreements come to the fore. It is structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group which appear to facilitate collegiate and cohesive policy interventions on the women's movement's terms. It does, however, make the leadership agency of key individuals particularly important for ensuring this equilibrium; leaving the movement exposed when the balance between individual leaders changes (due to retirement, changes in organisational structure and so on).

There are organisations which opt out of engagement with the Government's social capital agenda and associated funding strictures. The Belfast Feminist Network (BFN), formed in April 2010, describes itself as: 'People who want to do something about gender inequality. We are passionate about addressing the inequality and injustice women still experience. We believe that it is important to challenge gender stereotypes, especially those that foster inequality...We are conscious that 'feminism' is important to a wide range of people and is experienced and expressed in different ways' (BFN, 2014). The Network was established by two young women influenced by groups like UK Feminista, which have a significant social media presence and involvement of younger women. As a group run on an entirely voluntary and ad hoc basis and linked to the Queens' University Feminist Society, 'it's quite loose and free...[we] tend to organise around what we're interested in, as opposed to getting a group together that everyone agrees on one issue or everyone should be having one perspective' (Interview, BFN members: 8 July 2011). BFN has not pursued government funding, and are thus not bound by its requirements. This gives them a freedom in the content and delivery of their activism, whilst also distancing them from the structures of engagement with the process of policy formation that exist between the established women's movement and government.

As such, Deiana describes the Network as providing, 'an important example of new trajectories of civic activism in Northern Ireland' (Deiana, 2013: 407).

BFN does work in partnership with women's organisations in its campaigns; for instance, alongside WRDA and others in a series of protests in response to welfare reform (Deiana, 2013: 408). However, as one founding member noted, 'I think it's more hard linking with the women's sector here or with more established women's organisations, because they're more strict or it's such an age gap' (Interview, BFN members: 8 July 2011). Whilst some members of the BFN do attend the Ad Hoc Policy Group, they do so for their 'day jobs' as policy workers and not as representatives of the BFN, which is activist in orientation (Correspondence with Lynn Carvill); thereby maintaining distance from the more formally organised women's movement. As Monica McWilliams argued in relation to the emergence of groups like BFN, there is a degree of (perceived) outsider status:

Well they come and go so much...It seemed to me there was always an international bunch associated with that, so there wasn't the same continuity as the groups on the ground. And they were coming with their much more radical feminism, based I think on sexuality more and reproductive rights and stuff. Whereas the women staying here and living here were having to face [the situation]. I mean, they were wanting change in all those areas, but knew that it was very difficult for them to survive with that politics (Interview: 26 November 2012).

Nevertheless, BFN represents a form of feminist organising, 'located outside the realm of institutionalised politics and the community sector' (Deiana, 2013: 410). The Network's aims share much with established women's organisations, seeking both to develop a dialogue among feminists and activists interested in gender and to influence policy and legislation, and to provide information about feminism and gender equality issues via debates, training, seminars and protests (ibid: 407). Their organisational locus on social media and more fluid structure place them outside both the internal dynamic of the women's movement and linking structures to policy-makers like the Ad Hoc Policy Group and Gender Advisory Panel. This means that, 'because we don't have any funding, we're not tied...we're not government-funded so we can say what we want' (BFN, Interview: 8 July 2011); as such, BFN can undertake issue-driven activism at the direction of members and unconstrained by funder requirements. This creates interesting opportunities for awareness-raising and focused interventions into social and political debates from a gender perspective, particularly given the importance of social media in expanding existing networks within the movement, 'although movements are usually rooted in urban space...their ongoing existence takes place in the free space of the Internet. Because they are a network of networks, they can afford not to have an identifiable centre...they do not need a formal leadership...or a vertical organisation to distribute information or instructions'; creating a decentred structure which maximises participation opportunities and in which consensus relies upon ad hoc action and not the fulfilment of a programme of specific goals (Castells, 2012: 221 and 227).

As such, BFN by their nature stand apart from the established women's movement and with government, but also testify to the continuing vibrancy of bottom-up feminist groups and initiatives. They represent a leaderless collective seeking to make an impact in a community of organisations characterised by dominant individuals who are enmeshed with the Government through linking mechanisms, and provide an alternative form of feminist advocacy to Northern

Ireland women's organisations who broadly conform to a larger trend in which, 'Western European movements, in particular, display organised NGO activism that emphasises institutional advocacy in lieu of public voice', characterised as 'the liberal insider lobbying strategy' (Knappe and Lang, 2014: 2 and 13). BFN, by contrast, represent a clear example of organised fourth-wave feminism, critiquing, 'the lack of concise mobilisation around women's issues... [and using] the web to re-link older and newer organisations, foster stronger networks and encourage outreach to a new generation' (ibid: 4).

The strategy of the women's movement in moving away from insider status as a political party to insider status through seeking linking ties via a highly-networked and flexible structure which relies significantly upon core leaders, could be influenced in interesting ways by groups like BFN, which draw upon activist sentiment amongst younger women in particular and stand outside traditional funding arrangements and bridging structures. Both facets of feminist organising in Northern Ireland rely upon flexibility, and the increasing cross-fertilisation between the two could serve to reduce the inherent fragility of the women's movement's dependence on key individuals – a core group of whom have been involved as leaders from the pre-Agreement years and on - by drawing in and sustaining the involvement of a wider constituency of women into activism and into the movement; thereby cultivating a new and diversified generation of feminist leaders in Northern Ireland.

## **6. Establishing linking ties in a neo-liberal, gender neutral policy-making context**

Evidence has therefore shown the ways in which the women's movement has re-formulated its structures and lobbying techniques in light of the Government's ascendant good relations agenda, underpinned by a social capital theoretical base that prioritises ethnonational relations. The women's movement has had to re-group following the disbanding of the Women's Coalition both in the context of the Government's good relations agenda and, despite this social capital-informed good relations rhetoric, an under-emphasis on social policy driven by a pervasive gender neutral interpretation of equality legislation. Structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group are therefore effective by allowing the movement to work flexibly, issue-by-issue, through a policy-making environment that favours gender neutrality and adopts a lethargic approach to social policy. In this environment, strategically (and often multiply-)-placed leaders in the highly networked women's movement work through flexible and responsive structures to maximise opportunities for input and influence.

The networked structure of the women's movement with the reliance upon core leaders can therefore be seen as a response to the nature of policy-making in Northern Ireland. As argued in previous chapters, the very vibrancy of the women's movement can be attributed in large part to the paucity of government involvement at the local community level during the Troubles. Nevertheless, despite the dominance of social policies and services in public expenditure and devolved policy-making powers (Horgan and Gray, 2012: 474), there are few debates on the scope and consequences of welfare provision. This contrasts with Scotland and Wales, 'where commitment to the welfare state has been to the fore in discourses in the Scottish and Welsh parliaments in a way rarely articulated in Northern Ireland' (Gray and Birrell, 2011: 21). Birrell notes that a neo-liberal policy agenda prevails in Northern Ireland, with Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive narratives making minimal references to social justice, social democratic collectivism or welfare state values (in ibid: 21). It is this policy context which informs and shapes the Government's social capital agenda.

Indeed, a pertinent example of the nature of debate around social policy may be seen in the 'Women's/Family Groups Briefing' on welfare reform to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Social Development on 23 October 2012. Four representatives from the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group, including Lynn Carvill and Bronagh Hinds, appeared before the Committee in their capacity, 'solely to use our expertise to represent the interests and concerns of women' (DSD, 2012: 2), and emphasised the disproportionately negative impact of the introduction of universal credit on women. This is a key example of the Ad Hoc Policy group's strategy of developing a clear consensus around an issue of policy and pursuing high level engagement with government. In her presentation Lynn Carvill observed that: 'This welfare reform reduces women's capacity to work, economic autonomy, equality and personal security...We are disappointed at how little account has been taken of women's needs and circumstances, and we urge the Committee for Social Development to press for further progress on that' (DSD, 2012: 2).

The presentation at this Committee highlights a number of relevant points. The four representatives, appearing as the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group, come from groups with specific expertise on domestic violence, women and the economy, women and political representation and childcare, demonstrating the collaborative and complementary approach of the movement in its engagement with government on an issue-by-issue basis. This is supported elsewhere by Emma Patterson-Bennett: 'I got a meeting with Mark Durkan to talk about women in local government and our whole reform – took it to the NIWEP Board to see who was going to go. But then actually we were like this is Ad Hoc Policy Group, this is wider than NIWEP; we do need the other people who are key experts in this' (Interview: 10 December 2013). Moreover, the Committee appearance highlights the extent to which the women's movement is engaged with the policy-making process, at least at the level of direct governmental consultation.

Further, Bronagh Hinds alluded to the issue of gender neutrality and indifference to social policy, impressing on the Committee that: 'We also want to come back to the point about fair treatment of women, and women's access to financial, support because this Bill is in danger of removing absolutely all finances from women and putting them in a very dangerous position' (DSD, 2012: 5). Whilst interviewees highlighted their frustration with the gender neutral approach which characterises the policy-making process, the welfare reform debate demonstrates the women's movement's constructive engagement on policy-specific issues with policy-makers. It is also once again clear that a core leadership of women from within the movement are active in representing the views of the women's movement to government, and in mediating the relationship between the women's movement and the State. Leaders from a core group of organisations manage the opportunities for consultation and influence with government and are given responsibility from the collective for feeding messages both upwards to policy-makers and out to networks.

In reference to the welfare reform issue, Lynn Carvill noted that, 'government are proactively seeking the views of women on women's issues...we are being proactively sought at the moment by our Ministers.' She observed that, 'They're really concerned for their constituents and that only one payment is going into the house' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Constructive engagement with the Government has resulted in some action towards mitigating the asserted social costs of welfare reform: the Belfast Telegraph reported that the two main parties of government agreed a package (yet to reach the Executive agenda and thus implementation stage, due to Sinn Féin resistance), which, 'would cushion local benefit

claimants against the so called 'bedroom tax', which is being fiercely resisted elsewhere, they would ensure that no existing claimant would lose out if Universal Credit is introduced to replace a raft of other benefits and they would ensure that carers, like mothers, get a share of Universal credit paid directly to them' (Liam Clarke in the Belfast Telegraph: 17 February 2014). This statement reflects the language used by the women's movement to show the gendered impacts of welfare reform (see below), and is thus evidence of a successful linking social capital strategy of engaging in consultation with policy-makers, bolstered by evidence-based work.

Further evidence of existing and effective linking ties in relation to particular matters of policy; notably, welfare reform, can be seen in the WRDA's report *The Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge? A Comprehensive Analysis of the Impacts of the Financial Crisis*. Lynn Carvill notes that it, 'was initially conceived in response to the economic recession and subsequent downturn in 2009. The financial crisis loomed large in terms of media coverage but what was striking was the work sectors the media chose to focus attention on: construction and manufacturing. It appeared to be very much a 'mancession' ' (Lynn Carvill in Hinds, 2011: 5). The report seeks to address a knowledge deficit about women in the economy: 'this research examines women's position in terms of labour market participation and income both generally and in relation to impacts of the economic downturn. Overall, this report establishes a baseline for women's economic participation, the barriers and solutions' (ibid). The report's significance lies in the fact that, 'WRDA and the women's sector can now use this work to influence positively...the forthcoming NI Programme for Government and in the longer term drive forward the cross-departmental Gender Equality Strategy and associated departmental action plans' (ibid); that is, it is asserted that the research will be used as a tool for policy influence.

The research itself can be seen as the tangible display of the women's movement's linking ties to government: 'I want to acknowledge the financial help provided through the Office of the First and deputy First Minister. Without funding this project could not have happened'; then OFMDFM Head of Gender Policy Eileen Sung also sat on an expert advisory group to guide the project, along with Margaret Ward, Liz Law in her capacity as policy advisor for the Equality Commission and Paddy Hillyard from Queen's University Belfast (ibid). The report sets out a robust argument that the Westminster government's welfare reform package, notably the roll out of Universal Credit, will disproportionately impact upon women across the UK: 'The Universal Credit will be paid as a means-tested single monthly payment to a household replacing core means-tested benefits...Universal Credit does not provide individualised benefits, safeguard personal access to welfare support for women in couples or advance women's economic independence' (ibid: 120). The author notes that moving to, 'a single household payment and focusing on a primary earner, means that women...are being driven back into dependency mode in favour of a male bread-winner model...This is an inadequate, unequal and grossly unfair model...The Government should revisit this model and certainly the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly should consider at least how it can avoid the most damaging impacts on women' (ibid: 125).

The report's call for the Northern Ireland government to mitigate the gendered impact of welfare reform has had some success, as seen above and evident from financial and advisory support from OFMDFM for the report itself – a mark of at least the existence of linking ties to the Northern Ireland government and an implied acceptance on the Government's part of the added value of a piece of gendered economic research for the

Northern Ireland context. Shortly before publication, Lynn Carvill set out a clear strategic plan for influencing and lobbying civil servants and parliamentarians using the report's findings: 'The first part of this will be to influence the Programme for Government that's being currently drawn up...So we're being told...that a lot of the decisions being taken aren't really evidence-based, so what we're going to provide them with is evidence...with the Department for Social Development we'll be seeking a meeting with them to talk about welfare reform' (Interview: 22 June 2011).

Moreover, the following year, Lynn Carvill explained that the report had proven influential across the political spectrum in terms of the welfare reform debate; giving the women's movement access both to MLAs and to civil servants, 'we also have connections within the civil service with really fantastic men and women who work towards us and use the report. Bronagh's given loads of presentations, I've given loads of them; welfare reform more recently but on the report, because we've been saying look it's all there' (Interview: 27 November 2012). The arguments made both in the report and in wider women's movement campaigning have had direct impact on Assembly and departmental statements about welfare reform. In a 2012 Briefing Paper from a Northern Ireland Assembly Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry on the implementation of Universal Credit, the author notes that, 'payments [are] more likely to hit women harder, as the 'shock absorbers' of poverty women are more likely to go without when household finances are stretched', and '[there is] concern that nominating one person in the household to receive payment will impact on the economic autonomy of women. A particular issue for people in domestic abuse situations in which control and financial abuse are issues' (Murphy, 2012: 4 and 5).

However, tangible outcomes of arguments made in this regard by the women's movement have proven only partially successful. In 2012, Lynn Carvill commented that, 'the default at the moment [with Universal Credit] is that it's one payment made into a household, so we're saying if you're going down that line – in fact yeah, do one payment into the household, but make sure it goes to the second earner or the main carer in the household. And then you eradicate a lot of the risk around domestic violence' (Interview: 27 November 2012). At the DSD Assembly Questions and Answers in May 2013, the Minister responded to the following question: 'Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether their Department is seeking to ensure that money is available to allow the payment of universal credit directly to the main carer', with:

Mr McCausland: I recognise that in certain situations a single household payment of Universal Credit may lead to finances being controlled by one member of the household who does not have responsibility for managing household finances, in particular, adequately providing for the needs of children. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate to split the Universal Credit payment between the main carer and the other party in the household. Work is ongoing in this area (DSD: 2013c).

Whilst further references in DSD Assembly Q&As point to engagement and consultation, with mention made to women's movement evidence: 'I have tasked officials to develop and consult public representatives and voluntary sector representatives on a set of guidelines for determining the circumstances when the universal credit payment should be made on a twice-monthly basis or split between household partners' (DSD Minister McCausland in DSD: 2013b),

Lynn Carvill explains that this represents only a limited victory of the gendered arguments being made by the women's movement around welfare reform:

What we asked for was that the payment go to the carer or the second earner. That isn't what they've done; they're going to split the payment in exceptional circumstances. We're being consulted on who judges what exceptional circumstances are. But they will pay one payment into a household to the man, and in exceptional circumstances they will split it...What does that say to us? So they won't pay the payment to the woman, the full payment...we'll definitely not be leaving the man with no access to money. That's what they're saying. And I don't want the man to be without money, don't get me wrong, but you're happy to do that, or this? And neither of them is equal (Interview: 27 November 2012).

The existence of effective bridging mechanisms like the Ad Hoc Policy Group and the agency of core leaders have therefore enabled the women's movement to develop linking ties to policy-makers around specific subjects. This marks the successful implementation of the strategic re-direction outlined in the previous chapter; seeking consensus within the movement on an issue and using mechanisms like the Ad Hoc Policy Group – through which strong leadership agency is exerted to propel the agenda forward – to seek linking ties with government to exert policy influence. This is underpinned by the development of strong evidence-based campaigning; as Patricia Haren explained: 'So all our research would be around having good statistics and good research, so that no matter what department we're talking to, I've got the research to back it up' (Interview: 5 July 2011).

Lynn Carvill explained that establishing a core foundation of linking ties is a fundamental aspect of the women's movement's strategy for policy influence more generally, 'part of my job is to build relationships with politicians. That's easily 50-60 per cent of it. Then external to me and equally important, but the like of NIWEP and their 1325 Group – and all of that builds knowledge within the Assembly and capacity to move things forward' (Interview: 22 June 2011). The process of building relationships with female politicians and MLA candidates is presented as mutually beneficial for both parties; in the context of launching the Women's Manifesto, the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group held an event at which, 'we had 60 women and loads of new candidates who were a bit nervous, and women from each of the parties. And the feeling of support in the room...really struck me. The women's sector supporting politicians no matter where they were from, and knowing that it really helped those candidates' (ibid).

She explained that this process enables bonds of trust and understanding to develop between the women's movement and politicians, 'because of that, the women that did get elected either to Council or Assembly, we know them and they know us. It's about building that kind of trust, and they know that all we want is to support them – obviously we want our issues raised, but they all agreed with them there...the women's sector has definitely engaged at many, many different levels, and it's that building of relationships and levels of trust that's important' (ibid). Therefore, part of the linking ties strategy involves the cultivation of leadership agency between the women's movement and politicians; that is, developing understanding and trust at the level of individual politicians able, perhaps, to use their own leadership agency to advance the aims of the women's movement.



In a response to Westminster's proposed Transparency, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill, Margaret Ward explained that this strategy, particularly the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group's work with candidates through the Women's Manifesto, does clearly aim to influence the policy-making agenda, and to gender Northern Ireland politics more generally, 'the group works to give a public platform to women who might otherwise have little exposure, given the male-dominated nature of public life and media in Northern Ireland. This initiative has been undertaken before every election and we believe that it has been significant in raising women's issues and highlighting the inadequate representation of women in our political institutions' (WRDA, 2013). Therefore, the movement's strategy of developing links to female politicians and creating forums of engagement between politicians and the women's movement, and between the politicians themselves, is seen as having a wider benefit for gendering the policy debate:

There'll be women who probably agree with 99 per cent of the way WRDA thinks, but their parties won't agree with it...So it's about finding the common ground and how you support, and have those discussions, and open up those channels; and have places for them where they can talk. They're going to be talking about things that they would never have the space to; as much as anything else it's bringing them together to talk about things, and they probably never get that opportunity to be together, unless it's in an adversarial situation...The relationships that have been built have been tremendous (Interview, Lynn Carvill: 22 June 2011).

Leaders have therefore testified to a strategy of actively developing linking ties to elected and candidate MLAs founded upon finding common ground and raising awareness of the movement's core policy goals. This strategy is deployed primarily through the Ad Hoc Policy Group and its production of a Women's Manifesto, as a tool to crystallise women's movement election demands and seek commitment from the main political parties. This consensus-driven strategy enables the achievement of the kind of success seen with the campaign around welfare reform, which provides evidence both of a partial victory for the women's movement in its wish to see the disproportionate impact of welfare reform on women ameliorated by MLAs, and of the existence of linking ties to the Northern Ireland Assembly which produce financial and advisory support, and a sympathy for core arguments.

It is also dependant on effective leadership agency. Margaret Ward explained the success of the 2011 Women's Manifesto: 'It's been a process over past elections; this is the first time that we've been able to have all of the parties, we've never been able to get the UUP before and I think that's largely due to Lynn's developing of relationships'; she also tied the effectiveness of the Ad Hoc Policy Group to the WRDA's ability to act as Secretariat (Interview: 28 June 2011). The ability and resourced time of a skilled individual in this instance, and of a group of core leaders that more widely comprise structures like the Ad Hoc Policy Group, means that linking ties have been established and maintained through assiduous cultivation of relationships and building trust.

In the absence of these core leaders with a particular history and set of relationships within the women's movement and across the political and policy-making arenas, it is unclear whether such linking ties can be maintained. As Patricia Haren noted, 'the other thing I worry about in the sector is our legacy. We need young women coming up...are we bringing them along with us, where are they, who is going to take over when I'm not here anymore?'

(Interview: 5 July 2011). Linking ties therefore appear to rest in large part on the influence, abilities and personalities of a handful of key individuals within the movement, and in turn are dependent on the skill of these leaders to build and maintain effective inter-personal relationships with certain politicians, 'Lynn's been great in terms of making key contacts, but it's really on the basis of individuals rather than parties' (Interview, Margaret Ward: 28 June 2011).

Nevertheless, women's movement representatives pointed to examples of clear influence, demonstrating that their strategic engagement can and does yield results despite gender neutral policy tendencies, in cases where policy-makers' and the movement's interests overlap; albeit in a limited fashion as evident in the welfare reform campaign. However, despite evidence of some willingness to engage with the women's movement to address the impact of policies like welfare reform, the ability of linking ties to produce only partial success is influenced by the wider context of a prevailing generalised neo-liberal philosophy which has precipitated a pervasive economic turn in policy debate and formation. As Kate McCullough observed, 'you're afraid to mention social issues in case you're seen as a tree hugger...there's nearly a need in everything that you do to produce an economic plan, and the women's sector isn't really good at that, at showing a budget that says 'this is what we save you by doing this' ' (Interview: 21 June 2011).

Moreover, Ann Marie Gray noted that, 'people like Bronagh have been trying to turn around the childcare argument into an economic argument rather than the gender argument in the hope that that will help to shift things along, and I think that that might to some extent. But trying to argue something on the grounds of gender equality won't get far' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Patricia Haren supported this, 'the arguments we've been changing around to say if you want women out there and you want the economy to grow then you've got to take us into consideration – and that's helpful with departments like the Department of Employment and Learning, who really don't want to know; but if you say there's 37.8 per cent of economic inactivity is women, so you can't sit there anymore and tell us it's not your business' (Interview: 5 July 2011). Indeed, even issues which are at the core of the women's movement globally are argued for from an instrumental angle rather than an ideological: 'the abortion debate – it's been argued around the issues around access to healthcare, and I think that's because all of the groups know that to take that on the basis of women's rights won't go anywhere' (Interview, Ann Marie Gray: 27 November 2012). Therefore, whilst social justice arguments are used as seen in the above 'Women's/Family Groups Briefing' excerpt, the movement towards an 'economic imperative' in policy debate has nevertheless caused the women's movement to frame its platform of policy ambitions in this government-directed narrative.

As the above examples demonstrate, with the failure of the Women's Coalition to embed a formal engagement for the women's movement in policy formation, the women's movement – under the direction of key leaders deploying their agency to mediate and drive the agenda forward - has sought to secure alternative and consistent channels of dialogue with policy-makers, founded upon mechanisms with strong bridging ties that seek consensus on an issue-by-issue basis in order to deliver a coherent and collective voice to government. However, alongside the Northern Ireland government's gender neutral approach to policy-making is the new public management turn in the public sector, as discussed in Chapter 3.

This has precipitated a crisis in funding and support for women's organisations; the cumulative effect of an unstable funding environment that is comprised of a project-based

approach for women's voluntary and community organisations, impeded by multiple levels of funding programmes that make it difficult to determine suitable funding opportunities and eligibility, and that strain limited administrative resources (Side, 2009: 82). This is part of a generalised and lasting trend in Western governments; as Sawyer argues in relation to Australia, feminist bureaucrats and activists have had to shift from social justice discourse to market discourse, stressing human resource and efficiency arguments for gender equity, in order to be heard (Sawyer, 1996: 3), with operational funding for non-government organisations representing disadvantaged sections of the community being increasingly replaced by project-funding, tied to competitive tendering for service provision with no scope for representational or advocacy work (Sawyer, 2007: 25).

Lynn Carvill attests to this, 'everything has gone so much towards service provision, and left policy' (Interview: 27 November 2012), and is fundamentally tied to the Government funding shift towards service delivery that guarantees only short-term project funding, meaning that government values the women's movement in so far as it represents instrumental value, 'in terms of the women's sector – if they have been focused on delivering against the objectives of government departments, in a time of financial challenge, they will still be well placed to be resilient. I don't see it as perhaps so much of a threat if a group can demonstrate where they contribute to the overall aims of government' (Interview, Eileen Sung: 28 June 2011). Delivering on the Government agenda is thus crucial to securing financial support and, one can infer, as a route to influence in the policy-making process.

This reality exists despite the recognition in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of multiple levels of inequality, and the establishment of an equality framework as an outcome of the Agreement. This arrangement has nonetheless failed to result in any meaningful institutional understanding of the structural and systemic nature of gender inequality, notably at the highest level. O'Shea argues that based on its gender equality strategy, OFMDFM appears to lack a clear understanding to the detriment of real equality between men and women, 'the fear that pursuing equality for women under a gender heading may lead to a bland gender neutral approach that obscures the gendered pattern of discrimination is borne out by the OFMDFM document. Without clear action on the equality front, transition may mean transitory gains for women' (O'Shea, 2005: 39). This potential for the gains made in institutionalising and broadening the scope of the equality agenda to be undone by apathy amongst the political elite is evident in accounts from individuals in the women's movement. As Margaret Ward recalled, 'I went up to an event at Stormont that Women's Aid organised and there was a civil servant there saying 'I will always take a gender neutral approach to violence and I'm proud to do so' and you think 'are you just stupid?' ' (Interview: 28 June 2011).

This sense of frustration is supported by comments made by Patricia Haren, 'always – I'm sure you know where I'm coming from here, a very gender-neutral position from government departments; oh if the women need it the men need it' (Interview: 5 July 2011). Moreover, as Ann Marie Gray observed, the prevalence of a gender neutral approach extends to the heart of policy-making, '[the departmental Equality Officers] take on equality was fascinating; I remember the education people saying 'well we couldn't do that because we have to treat boys and girls the same'...they didn't have any understanding of how you could use the legislation to address historical disadvantage' (Interview: 27 November 2012). At the heart of this is a broad apathy towards gender as a feature in the process of forming and enacting policy. Monica McWilliams commented that, 'we don't have femocrats in our

bureaucracy and we don't have strong feminists in our cabinet...at the end of the day even the best of the women still belong to very conservative parties on women's issues' (Interview: 26 November 2012); supported by Ann Marie Gray, 'the Assembly hasn't prioritised gender. There's no - with the exception of a few people - gender champions in the big parties, and nobody is willing to stand up...and say we're not doing well here, and that's what would ultimately drive departments because they're not going to rail against something that they see as being not welcomed... [they're] not going to go and do battle for the sake of gender' (Interview: 27 November 2012).

There is therefore a shared frustration expressed by women's movement leaders with policy-makers' gender neutral approach to equality, and some agreement about the ways to achieve gender equality in opposition to the neutrality approach. However, this reality has implications for establishing linking ties to policy-makers. In the case of welfare reform, where politicians could see the direct impact on constituents of UK-wide reform and secure certain exemptions for Northern Ireland, the linking ties established between the women's movement and politicians, embodied in the Ad Hoc Policy Group, have thus far proven somewhat effective and collaborative. However, the larger institutional culture of a gender neutral interpretation of equality legislation and indifference to social justice arguments for gender equality have created an environment in which achieving this kind of exchange, let alone progress on policy aims, is infrequent at best. As Monica McWilliams summarised, 'The brotherhood got together, and the brotherhood decided on what was to be prioritised, and it certainly wasn't work on women or women's rights, or progressive legislation. And the brotherhood decided on what would get resourced, and women held on by their fingernails to what they'd already put in place, and some of them go backwards' (Interview: 26 November 2012).

## **7. Conclusion**

This chapter took as its foundation the conclusions drawn in Chapter 4, which showed the women's movement's bridging ties to be largely robust and multi-faceted due to a strategy of engaging with policy through a flexible and highly-networked structure, which relies upon key leaders to ensure its functionality and propel the agenda forward; enabling an exploration of whether these ties have been and are being mobilised by the Northern Ireland women's movement to engage as a collective with policy-makers. This discussion has been framed in the context of the Northern Ireland government's own social capital agenda alongside the dominance of a gender-neutral, neo-liberal approach to policy making. The rise of a pervasive 'good relations' narrative has been a key feature of the post-Peace Agreement policy landscape, with the improvement of social capital levels between Protestant and Catholic communities at the core of this agenda. This has worked alongside a resilient gender neutral approach to policy-making across government, as well as a lack of inter-departmental cooperation and 'silo mentality' on the part of government ministries (Horgan and Gray, 2012: 470), to sideline efforts by the women's movement to broaden the terms of the social capital debate in Northern Ireland beyond the sectarian binary and generate meaningful, sustained debate about gender equality. As Monica Mc Williams observed, 'you have to have a desire and a wish, and if you don't see it as destabilising why would you bother? They might at most

see it as a luxury that'll come some day, but it can wait. There are more important issues – that's in their mindset; obviously women think differently' (Interview: 26 November 2012).

Therefore, whilst the women's movement does have notable access to politicians and to the policy-making process through consultation and a strategy of evidence-based campaigns to build a coalition of support around certain issues, their influence is constrained by a good relations agenda and gender neutral policy-making approach that continues to set the terms of engagement. However, evidence has supported and extended the argument made in Chapter 4; leaders in key strategic roles enable a highly flexible and densely-networked movement to establish linking ties to policy-makers and assert influence where avenues (albeit limited) exist. Successful examples have been given, but this chapter has also argued that bridging and linking ties rely heavily upon these leaders, their individual agency and ability to work effectively with each other through bridging mechanisms and, where possible, with policy-makers.

Evidence has shown the pitfalls of working through bridging and linking structures which are created according to the Government's agenda; as Findlay and Randall note, 'state funding is part of a deliberate state policy of creating a relationship with community organisations which will contain and regulate their demands' (in Sawer and Jupp, 1996: 84). In this context, the dominance of key leaders working within a competitive and under-funded environment can work against collaboration and the embedding of bridging and linking social capital that can be 'spent' to advance the movement's aims. Moreover, this chapter has analysed the emergence of new kinds of grassroots feminist activism, arguing that groups like BFN have the potential to complement and galvanise the established women's movement, by supplementing the latter's 'liberal insider lobbying strategy' with forms of activism centred around social media campaigning and non-institutional engagement.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Strategic engagement beyond the border: linking social capital at the UK, European and UN levels**

#### **1. Introduction**

Chapter 3 emphasised the importance of the international arena for the Northern Ireland women's movement, both as a broadly supportive environment for the development of shared ideas, and as an alternative route for engaging with policy at home and abroad. This chapter will address the research questions outlined in chapter 1, and will argue that one organisation leads much of the movement's engagement with British, European and UN structures; demonstrating a high degree of strategic consensus in the movement and concentrating a significant amount of agency in the small number of well-established, voluntary leaders who mediate and coordinate engagement with and use of international mechanisms.

It will be shown that this degree of consensus facilitates effective and often cohesive engagement; disseminating a message that is also enthusiastically adopted by other organisations in their domestic campaigning work and suggests that leadership agency is facilitating the development of social capital as a collectively-held resource. As Ling and Dale argue, 'while networks can build social capital...agency at the individual and community levels is needed to mobilise this social capital...Both agency and social capital must be available in a community in order to affect meaningful change' (Ling and Dale, 2013: 3). Agency, then, plays an activating role in social capital and the role of leaders in mobilising linking ties beyond the domestic level will be shown in this chapter. However, concentrated authority in one under-resourced organisation undermines the movement's ability to capitalise on expert and experienced leaders to establish linking ties that would bring about domestic change. Varied international engagement also depends on the power of these institutions to meaningfully advance the movement's message by compelling action; the muted response of the Northern Irish and British governments suggests that these linking ties are not producing tangible policy results.

#### **2. Engagement with the international arena before and during the Women's Coalition**

Chapter 3 pointed to the influence that engagement beyond the domestic level and with the global women's movement had on the development of the women's movement and the Women's Coalition as forums for participating in the development of ideas, institutions and alliances (see Fearon and McWilliams, 1998 and Rynder, 2002). This is confirmed by interviewees; Liz Law from the Equality Commission placed this in the larger context of the Northern Ireland civil and political communities, 'Northern Ireland recognised that in the European setting we could have conversations that we couldn't have here' (Interview: 6 July 2011). Bronagh Hinds highlighted the influence of leadership agency in precipitating the voluntary sector's involvement with European policy in the pre-Belfast Agreement period, 'Quintin Oliver was Director of NICVA [Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action] and I was Chair...We actually ploughed a field for the voluntary sector into the European Structural funds' (Interview: 28 June 2011). Writing in 1995, McWilliams observed the extent to which

engagement with European policy, institutions and groups was becoming a feature of the women's movement, 'a European dimension has now been established within the women's movement that adds to the plurality of identities for women in Northern Ireland, once again reflecting the different kinds of identity that individuals may hold simultaneously within various women's groups' (McWilliams, 1995: 31).

Leadership agency played an important role in tying the women's movement into international processes through organisational engagement, 'I founded [NIWEP] to break down the issue about only the UK link going through London and work with people in Scotland to do that' (Interview, Bronagh Hinds: 28 June 2011); alluding to a wish to establish a stronger Northern Ireland identity in Europe and internationally, underpinned by alliances at the UK level. Kate McCullough supports this, noting the particular value that leaders saw in developing relationships with the European women's movement and seeking influence into policy at that level: 'NIWEP was created specifically in relation to the European Women's Lobby. There was no one else doing that, and no one else would take on that work because they had their other specific tasks' (Interview: 10 December 2013). This is reiterated by Liz Law, 'in the first days, those alternatives weren't there. The European forum was seen as a place where those discussions could take place. In general, Northern Ireland played the role of being the interested bit of the UK in Thatcher's Britain...So some of the early equal pay stuff – it was actually a recognition of some of the opportunities there' (Interview: 21 June 2011). As outlined in Chapter 3, it was the networks and expertise built up in and through NIWEP that proved a central element to forming the NIWC.

Therefore, the European and international dimensions have been of particular importance to the women's movement, and engagement was consciously sought by leaders in order to create opportunities for dialogue that were unavailable elsewhere – often in ways that were innovative in the larger Northern Ireland context. Women's Coalition leaders recognised that the European and international arenas had the potential to strengthen their agendas, and this engagement has been a clear strategic continuation. NIWEP, in particular, has continued the strategic engagement with UN and European mechanisms and networks. It acts as an umbrella for other women's organisations; disseminating information and seeking input through its network. Speaking in the context of a discussion about the European Convention on Domestic Violence, Liz Law characterised this strategy as a 'pincer movement'; engaging with UN instruments like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW<sup>3</sup>) to place their agenda on an international stage to compel government action.

Interview evidence shows that key to European engagement was the women's movement's involvement with the increasingly active international women's rights movement. Bronagh Hinds recalled the route to international engagement as one of chance and making connections:

We worked on getting the Northern Ireland delegation, whose flights we booked to go to Beijing [Fourth World Conference on Women] and I had not a penny in the

---

<sup>3</sup> CEDAW is commonly described as the international bill of rights for women. It defines discrimination against women and establishes an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The UK government signed and ratified CEDAW in 1982 and 1986 respectively. State parties are examined every four years, and submit a report detailing progress made on accelerating gender equality the year before their examination.

account, when we couldn't get any money out of government...women had come to us and said, you were at the one in Kenya in 1985, can you help? I went to Kenya [1985 UN Third World Conference on Women]...I got there expecting there to be a few women and discovered there were 26,000 women and I was the only one from Northern Ireland (Interview: 28 June 2011).

This proved of considerable importance to the development of the movement, 'we were building those contacts and skills and it just carried us through – we took that with us wherever we went. And the whole thing was about being engaging, being inclusive, not about holding things to ourselves' (Ann Hope, Interview: 28 June 2011). This dynamic engagement with the international arena laid the foundations for the strategic use of international gender mechanisms in the Northern Irish context. Margaret Ward described the ways in which the women's movement draws upon UN mechanisms to press Westminster and Stormont on policy of particular salience for women, notably reproductive rights and women and conflict:

All the tricky issues are in CEDAW and they absolutely don't want to do anything on them. So reproductive rights...1325<sup>4</sup> is the other...[the NI Government] has definitely tried to dampen that down, saying that 'the advice has been that it isn't relevant here because under the Geneva Convention we weren't classified as a war situation and that's what 1325 is about' – absolute rubbish. So I got legal advice and developed a briefing...to counter that, because I thought it was a really dangerous way to go (Interview: 28 June 2011).

The recognition, therefore, that the international policy-making arena was a fertile environment for sharing experiences and expertise, acquiring external legitimacy and cementing shared positions as a movement was crucial to the movement's ability to pursue its goals; most particularly, in locating their demands within an international narrative of gender equality, and to deploy this as leverage with the Northern Ireland and British governments. The movement has maintained and extended this strategic engagement, developing an approach that simultaneously applies pressure locally from below and internationally from above.

### **3. Linking ties with the British government**

The women's movement has sought to translate its bridging ties into political engagement beyond the Northern Ireland Assembly, in order to influence both international policy generally and Westminster's foreign policy; but more significantly, to create a stronger foundation for lobbying on issues that affect Northern Irish women, and thus to engender policy change. The UK level is a key site of engagement for the movement, and a primary means through which it engaged with the gender equality debate and policy-making processes at this level was through the Women's National Commission (WNC), a central part of UK

---

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security; adopted 31 October 2000. 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of their equal participation in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security (UN Security Council, 2000: 1).



'gender architecture' from its establishment in 1969 until its abolition in 2010. The last two years of the WNC had seen it seek to develop a more comprehensive approach to representing women across the Four Nations, with a Commissioner from each devolved nation on the Board, and Four Nations representation on all working groups and advisory forums. As will be explored further below, this has not been replicated in the post-WNC women's movement environment, largely due to a lack of resources and opportunities for networking and sharing best practice. In a message sent after the announcement to abolish the WNC by the outgoing WNC Northern Ireland Commissioner, Bronagh Hinds, to over fifty individual and organisational WNC partners in Northern Ireland, she noted that,

We have worked towards a WNC that is now regionally representative and that is beginning to take explicit account of the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh dimensions in arriving at a more representative UK position. Our work in this was not complete, of course, but we were making significant progress. Many of you participated in our WNC NI conferences over the last few years, plus a number of NI WNC Partner meetings. Many of you inputted NI views to the WNC consultation on the Minister for Women priorities (27 September 2010).

The WNC was implementing a Four Nations model that incorporated attention to issues specific to the devolved nations, UK policy originating from a devolved nation, and integration of the practices and views in different nations into Westminster-generated policy. This model helped to develop bridging social capital between the NI women's movement and the wider UK women's movement. Notably, the Northern Ireland movement was able to more effectively feed into cross-UK work like the UK-wide WNC CEDAW Shadow Report, the WNC Advisory Forum and working groups, in which the NI women's movement brought particular expertise. Similarly, these forums allowed the movement, via designated leaders, to raise issues with particular resonance for Northern Ireland, like reproductive rights and UNSCR 1325, and seek support from the UK-wide women's movement for lobbying efforts specific to Northern Ireland. Moreover, regular participation (primarily of Women's Aid Northern Ireland) in the WNC's Violence Against Women working group, which proved instrumental in the development of the Labour cross-government Violence Against Women Strategy, allowed the Northern Ireland movement to bring its long-term experience in tackling domestic violence and partnerships with the devolved administration; as well as reciprocally gaining greater insight into working with black and minority ethnic women through contact with specialist groups and service providers from elsewhere in the UK who also sat on the Group (Bronagh Hinds in WNC: 2010b).

Therefore, engagement with the WNC in a manner shaped by a Four Nations model allowed for the development of bridging links amongst women's groups working across the UK and under different devolved administrations with country-specific issues. This engagement was funded by the WNC, and WNC events were also held in Northern Ireland and led by the WNC Northern Ireland Commissioner. Therefore, a stronger Four Nations model in particular meant that bridging social capital was being embedded in a meaningful and well-resourced manner. This facilitated opportunities for greater influence by the NI women's movement over Westminster policy-making. That is, just as closer bridging ties amongst women's groups in Northern Ireland has created a stronger foundation for establishing linking ties to policy-

makers, so too did more effective engagement with the WNC create opportunities for developing linking social capital with Westminster.

This relationship was mediated through leading gate-keepers, notably Bronagh Hinds as the WNC Commissioner, and NIWEP as the leading Northern Ireland WNC partner who represented the movement most frequently to the WNC. Whilst interviewees expressed satisfaction with this arrangement and attested to its effectiveness, it does further demonstrate the dominant leadership agency of certain individuals and organisations within the movement. Margaret Ward noted that NIWEP serves as the outward-facing organisation with responsibility for relationships across the rest of the UK, 'the rest of us don't tend to do that, there isn't that kind of sharing' (Interview: 28 June 2011). As Bourdieu notes, 'the communal social capital of a group or network is concentrated and embodied in its representatives or leaders' (Bourdieu, 1986). Strong communal social capital existed in the movement in relation to the WNC because its representatives were effective in collaborating at this level to create new norms, represent its interests and ensure successful communication. However, the dependence on the WNC mechanism of structured engagement between the women's movements of the UK's Four Nations, mediated through NIWEP and the Northern Ireland WNC Commissioner, means that the WNC's abolition has left the movement even more reliant on NIWEP's relationships with women's organisations in Britain; as an under-resourced and voluntary organisation, it is less able to ensure the maintenance of communal social capital without the WNC structure and resourcing.

The WNC was a mechanism for managing linking ties between the UK women's movement and Westminster. By working through key leaders to use the WNC structure to lobby the UK government, the NI movement could speak with a greater collective voice. NIWEP participated as integral members of the WNC's Advisory Forum, which focused on the UN, Europe and the Commonwealth and was an arena for UK-wide women's movement representatives to discuss policy developments together and with government officials and other key stakeholders, particularly in relation to CEDAW, the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), EU policy and the Commonwealth Heads of Governments meetings. Through this forum, the NI women's movement secured WNC support for lobbying around UNSCR 1325 and reproductive rights; for instance, in a speech to the WNC Advisory Forum, Bronagh Hinds called on the UK government to, 'apply pressure to increase the number of women in political and public life in Northern Ireland...the UK Government has international commitments to fulfil on the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and UNSCR 1325...[it] must expect the Northern Ireland Executive and Administration to play their parts in fulfilling the UK's obligations' (Hinds, 2010b). Following this speech, the WNC Advisory Forum agreed to send a letter to Henry Bellingham MP, then Parliamentary Under Secretary for the UN in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In this letter, WNC Chair Baroness Gould exhorted the Government to recognise the relevance of UNSCR 1325 for Northern Ireland, and include it in the National Action Plan (NAP):

Many of our Partners...believe that the ongoing gender inequities which follow from a state of insecurity could be improved upon by applying 1325 to the region. Indeed, the CEDAW Committee referred the UK to the application of 1325 to Northern Ireland in 2008, and will expect a progress report on this in the UK's next report...Many of our partners believe that applying 1325 domestically...would help to ensure that women's informal and substantial action on conflict prevention,

conflict resolution and peace building is better recognised, highlighted and inserted into formal processes (WNC, 2009).

This is evidence of the NI women's movement's strategy of developing and deploying bridging social capital with the UK women's movement to enhance linking ties to Westminster, in order to lobby for changes in Northern Ireland. The letter demonstrates the 'pincer movement' referred to above: it calls for the FCO to discuss with the Northern Ireland Administration how the latter can be involved in, 'developing an action plan to implement 1325 in Northern Ireland [and] using the constructive processes, useful lessons and models from Northern Ireland in overseas work on 1325.' Moreover, the strategy is evident in a press release from the organisation DemocraShe, issued to welcome proposals to improve Executive working and highlight that despite such positive developments, the issue of women's political under-representation has received little focus: ' "It is Ministers and their departments who are responsible for making public appointments. In my role as the Northern Ireland Commissioner...the WNC is working with the Minister for Women and the Government Equalities Office to tackle the issue of women and public appointments. We would like to see the Executive put similar initiatives in place in Northern Ireland," said Bronagh Hinds' (DemocraShe, 2010).

In this instance, Bronagh Hinds invoked processes of consultation of the Northern Ireland women's movement with the UK Minister through the WNC to reflect back the Northern Ireland Executive's own inaction; drawing strategically on the leadership agency afforded by her status as WNC Commissioner and key interlocutor for the NI movement to the WNC. Similarly, a letter from the WNC Chair to Silvia Pimental, then Chair of the CEDAW Committee, noted that Northern Irish women, 'are discriminated against compared with women in the rest of the UK in trying to exercise their reproductive rights...women beyond Northern Ireland would like to see progress to equalise these rights for women across the UK. We very much hope that the new year will bring the good news that you will...grant their request for an Optional Protocol Inquiry' (WNC, 2010c).

This letter shows bridging social capital with the WNC being deployed to seek support from a UN human rights committee in its interaction with the UK government: 'there is a devolved legislature in Northern Ireland but, nevertheless, the UK government still has the responsibility to ensure that all parts of the UK meet the State's international obligations' (WNC, 2010c). The Northern Ireland women's movement's engagement with the UN gender equality agenda will be explored further below; however, in this context the evidence shows the ways in which movement leaders utilised bridging ties with the UK women's movement to achieve stronger linking ties to Westminster and supranational institutions, in order to pursue particular goals for women in Northern Ireland.

Similarly, as with UNSCR 1325, NIWEP 'mainstreamed' Northern Ireland-specific issues or policy exceptionalism into the WNC's work through participation in the WNC's Advisory Forum. In a discussion in the Europe & Commonwealth Group of the Advisory Forum about the Commonwealth 9<sup>th</sup> Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting (9WAMM), which a WNC representative had attended, Liz Law drew on the 9WAMM's Bridgetown Communiqué – which calls on the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist countries to develop inclusive, gender-sensitive governance models and for the Working Group on Gender, Peace and Security to be made fully operational (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2010) – to argue that the UK Department for International Development's line on 1325 was not defensible in light of the UK

government's position with regard to Northern Ireland (WNC, 2010d). Meanwhile, in the context of a discussion about preparations for the next CEDAW Examination, Kate McCullough raised the concerns of the NI movement that the recently legislated Equality Act does not apply to Northern Ireland, highlighting issues that could be addressed under CEDAW. Following this discussion, the Group pledged to write to the relevant Minister outlining the concerns of the NI women's movement and outline the imbalances in equality legislation between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK (WNC, 2010e).

The evidence therefore shows that the relationship with the WNC did enable linking ties between the Northern Ireland women's movement and Westminster; creating opportunities to interact directly with policy-makers in the context of domestic and European legislation, and to use this interaction to highlight social and political discrepancies for women in Northern Ireland in relation to the rest of the UK. The bridging ties to women's groups across the UK and linking ties to Westminster and beyond were collectively-held resources – interviewees clearly expressed satisfaction with the relationship to the WNC – but the individual agency of leaders played a central role in converting social capital into strategic action. The effectiveness of these links in terms of producing desired outcomes has been limited; the UK government has not yet incorporated UNSCR 1325 into its NAP, and no action has been taken to bring Northern Ireland women's reproductive rights into line with the rest of the UK. However, the WNC was a key mechanism through which the movement could seek influence and input at the UK-wide level through a partnership model, making use of the WNC's linking ties to engage with Westminster and seeking to deploy this capital to create and embed ties at the Assembly level and acquire influence internationally.

This was clearly evident at the final WNC Northern Ireland partner meeting on 13 December 2010, at which I was present as WNC International Policy Advisor. It was held in partnership with the Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group and NIWEP, to look at the development of a Women's Manifesto, progress towards the next CEDAW Examination and a post-WNC UK gender architecture; showing the strong reciprocal ties between these organisations. This meeting engaged a wider range of organisations and enabled a better connection between multiple levels in terms of policy engagement. That is, this WNC-facilitated meeting demonstrated the interconnections between the devolved Northern Ireland, UK and UN levels, and highlighted the breadth of engagement across the NI women's movement with these intersecting levels. The WNC abolition, as a formal mechanism for engaging at the UK and international levels, has therefore impacted negatively on the ability of the women's movement to maintain and extend its linking ties to the British government and, to a lesser degree, the international level.

Evidence from interviews and participant observation will be mobilised as evidence of this detrimental impact; however, the impact of the WNC's abolition must first be placed in the context of the UK government's social capital agenda, the Big Society. In a discussion about evidence for the feminisation of government policy under the Coalition, Bryson observes that:

While the attempt to reach out to women is of course welcome, the need to do this would have been much less urgent if the Government had not first abolished the Women's National Commission (WNC) as part of its 'bonfire of the quangos'...the 670 partners who had found a voice through the WNC 'included all sorts of views and groups, many of them so far outside the charmed circle of political power that they would otherwise be unseen and unheard' (Ashley, 2010) (Bryson, 2012: 161).

According to Bryson, the WNC's closure contradicts the Government pledge to reach and engage more British women according to the wider aims of the Big Society, the ideological driver for the 'bonfire of the quangos'; in which the stated rationale has been to transfer power, responsibility and decision making from the State to individuals and local communities (Evans, 2011: 164). Pattie and Johnston assert the positive influence of social capital theory on Big Society ideology, noting that where active communities exist, the generation of social capital and thus building of the Big Society will become a self-sustaining phenomenon (Pattie and Johnston, 2011: 404). Whereas the Northern Ireland administration's 'good relations' social capital agenda seeks to define the Government's relationship with the voluntary sector through a sectarian prism, the British government's social capital agenda is, 'one of the strongest refrains throughout the Coalition Government's plans for mending 'financially Broken Britain' through public service reform, which itself is an agenda driven by the biggest cuts in public spending for many decades', alongside a desire to mend 'politically broken Britain' by dismantling state power structures and empowering citizens and communities (Evans, 2011: 165 and 169).

As Bryson observes, therefore, in the context of reaching out to women and empowering them as active citizens, the WNC abolition removed an organisation that served that very function; replacing it with a 'Women's Engagement' email newsletter that ostensibly seeks to bring women closer to Ministers whilst ensuring that the relationship is primarily mediated electronically, and reducing the opportunities for face-to-face interaction. In the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) conducted by the Government Equalities Office (GEO), it was reported that the rationale for abolition, 'ensure[s] that Ministers in future take direct responsibility for decisions on these issues rather than placing them at arms length' (GEO, 2010: 3); a confusing statement in light of the WNC's operational mandate to consult with and convey the views of women to government, and not to make policy decisions of any kind. As the UK NGO CEDAW Shadow Report notes, produced by the London-based Women's Resource Centre in consultation with women's groups across the UK, the new post-WNC arrangement is based on mediating the State's relationship with the women's movement almost wholly on the Government's terms, with little apparent accountability or transparency:

We welcome various new mechanisms introduced by the GEO to be engaged with women: an improved website; a newsletter...and small meetings of six selected organisations at a time with the Minister which have expertise in a chosen topic. However, these meetings are determined wholly from within government, to its agenda and are not accountable to civil society in any sense. There is no mechanism for women to even know which topics are under discussion with whom or when. Nor what the outcomes are. Hence, civil society has no overview and this has led to a fragmentation and disempowerment of women and their organisations (WRC, 2013: 3).

Moreover, as illustrated by an observer in the NGO CEDAW Shadow report, Big Society rhetoric ignores the fundamental need to resource organisations that are undertaking crucial infrastructure work at the local community level: 'We are being told about the Big Society, and that all this will be provided by charitable organisations, and people in communities will band together and do it all. That's not happening because all those organisations that have been

helping people are under threat...in my community. They are fighting for every pound that they get in' (ibid: 7).

The evidence above shows the extent to which leading individuals from the NI movement engaged with the WNC as a resourced means for regularly seeking to influence Westminster policy-making. Its abolition has fundamentally weakened linking ties to the British government. As a NIWEP contribution to the Shadow report argues:

As an established and funded body with representation from every country of the UK (and with each representative being well linked into networks in their own regions), the WNC was able to collate data and analyze developments in relation to women's equality and inequality across the four countries. The 'alternative' arrangements [...] have not taken into consideration the complexities of working across regions with devolved administrations or fundamental inequalities such as...the need to adequately resource participation. The 'special measures' to increase equality...have not been established in a way (in terms of representation and ways of working) that suggests they are meant to have significance in Northern Ireland (WRC, 2013: 4).

Thus, the value of the WNC to the Northern Ireland women's movement lay in its *resourced* representation of women across the Four Nations to the UK government, with due regard to devolved matters. Interviewees attested to the importance of the WNC connection for enabling the movement to more effectively engage beyond the Northern Ireland level. In a discussion about the WNC CEDAW Shadow report, Ann Marie Gray noted that the opportunity for collective action had been lost, and highlighted the key role of leadership agency in representing the NI movement's interests: 'it's harder to get a sense of UK-ness if you like...people felt a sense of ownership over [the WNC] report...With the WNC there were always Northern Ireland people there; we were able to feed the stuff through to Ann [Hope] or to Bronagh [Hinds], and it got into the report' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Lynn Carvill described the process of working to transform the WNC into an organisation that more effectively represented women beyond an England-centric perspective, 'There was this fight because it was Bronagh and [Ann] – that fight where Northern Ireland was seen as equal, you know England don't be telling us...you can't take over, it has to be issues around all of us...but actually in having a whole voice, a UK-wide voice, was good for women' (Interview: 27 November 2012).

Evidence shows that with the WNC's abolition, institutional understanding of devolution and gender equality mechanisms has been diminished. The movement's WNC participation allowed it to highlight discrepancies in equality provision for women in Northern Ireland compared to elsewhere in the UK. However, the UK government's own EQIA to accompany the WNC abolition demonstrates a lack of understanding that devolution and Good Friday/Belfast Agreement arrangements have instituted a different system of equality mechanisms, stating that, 'the EHRC is recognised...as the UK's human rights body' (GEO, 2010: 5). As Liz Law explained, 'if you read the Equality Impact Assessment [it] talks repeatedly about the EHRC as the human rights body for the UK...The GEO organised a meeting...although I was there from NIWEP I felt duty bound [to say], that the EHRC were there but there hadn't been any invitation from Northern Ireland [for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland]' (Interview: 6 July 2011). Indeed, neither Northern Ireland nor wider issues related to devolution were noted in the EQIA at all. The lack of British government acknowledgement

about the relationship between devolution and equality points to an erosion in the quality of linking ties following the WNC's abolition.

This erosion was conveyed in a NIWEP Committee meeting which I attended, at which they discussed failed attempts to secure funding for a 'roundtable on the UK mechanism for NGO women's organisations.' Concern was expressed that any possible new post-WNC UK gender equality mechanism had to meaningfully represent the UK as a whole; reflecting unease in the movement that without the WNC's 'umbrella' function to give due weight to devolved policy matters, Northern Ireland policy issues and the voice of the women's movement could be subsumed into an England-centric narrative. As Kate McCullough explained at the meeting, 'they don't quite understand – some of the Brits – the things that aren't devolved, around social security, pensions, Europe, International. And those things need to be clearly set out for them so they see it's not as cut and dried as they think' (NIWEP Committee meeting: 6 July 2011). Kate reiterated this point in an interview, 'there is definitely a need for a roundtable...And that needs to be about roles, responsibilities, and it needs to be about joining up that UK-ness again. Liz has been searching high and low for money for it...she's started calling it the UK-ness meeting' (Interview: 10 December 2013). This suggests that the UK-wide women's movement is lodged on unstable ground in terms of its ability to sustain collective efforts, and that the WNC provided a crucial mechanism for facilitating bridging social capital which cannot be maintained without the resources to sustain it.

A lack of understanding about the implications of devolution for gender equality policy amongst women's groups elsewhere in the UK also undermines the foundations of UK-wide women's movement bridging social capital. The result of this bridging deficit is a fragmentation in the women's movement at the UK level, weakening its legitimacy as a representational movement to be consulted and engaged by government. As Kate McCullough noted, 'My fear is that GEO...they come along and try to pass things over to those with the greatest resources – not whether they're of any use, not whether they can do the job...they can look after it, they can put the information up – give it to them' (NIWEP Committee meeting: 6 July 2011). The fragmentation that has come from the removal of a UK-wide structure has meant that the Government is able to minimise its engagement with, and resourcing of, the women's movement as a whole. As such, linking ties become the preserve of a small number of externally-resourced women's groups that are geographically close to Westminster. Therefore, the loss of 'UK-ness' as described by Ann Marie Gray has left the Northern Ireland movement without a crucial arena for structured engagement with UK policy debates.

Furthermore, without the Four Nations mandate of the WNC, the UK government more easily evades responsibility for addressing issues raised by the NI women's movement, as Kate McCullough reported, 'we're passed from pillar to post. I wrote to the GEO and said please, please, please help us and they said go to Eileen [Sung]; went to Eileen, she sent us back to GEO. And here we have the prime example of what it's going to be like for women in the future – we're just going to be...pushed all over the place' (NIWEP Committee meeting: 6 July 2011). As will be shown below with reference to the movement's engagement with the British government at the UN level, this is part of a pattern of both the devolved government and British government deferring responsibility to the other. The women's movements of the UK have mobilised to replicate some of the WNC's functions, particularly in terms of international engagement; both with regard to CEDAW (to be discussed in section 5 below) and CSW. The WNC's work coordinating women's movement engagement with CSW and mediating the relationship with the UK government each year has been taken up to a great

extent by the UK NGO CSW Alliance, for which NAWO serves as the Secretariat. By building in travel costs to its funding arrangement with the Trust that supports this work, NAWO is able to cover costs for devolved nation representatives to attend meetings in England. The NI movement replicates the pattern of engagement seen with the WNC; it is NIWEP leaders who attend meetings and contribute to documents.

For instance, the CSW Alliance produced a UK-wide response to the UK government's answers to the UNECE [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe] Questionnaire on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. NIWEP's input once again shows the strategic engagement with international processes to highlight discrepancies in policy across the Four Nations; for instance, the report calls for, 'change so that women in Northern Ireland will not continue to be denied the fundamental rights to reproductive health which [is] accessible to women in the rest of the UK...This includes implementing repeated CEDAW Committee recommendations' (UK NGO CSW Alliance, 2014: 6). Such forums allow for the exercise of NI movement leadership agency and expertise to be fed into a UK-wide structure, but such efforts by the UK women's movement rely on grants which are often short-term and subject to changes in funders' priorities.

The evidence therefore shows that the Northern Ireland women's movement, through the agency and leadership of key representatives, had been productively engaged with the WNC as a way to establish links with the UK government and raise issues specific to Northern Ireland at the UK level. However, the WNC's abolition has revealed the tenuous foundation of bridging social capital in the women's movement across the UK, without an overarching and financially-resourced infrastructure to formalise sharing and consultation amongst and between women's groups across the UK. The result has been that the NI movement's links to the British government have weakened, not least because the latter has shown a lack of political will and willingness to resource this relationship.

#### **4. Linking ties at the European level**

Northern Irish civil society and political institutions have engaged enthusiastically with Europe, not least due to European involvement through the PEACE funds. In its *Report on its Inquiry into Consideration of European Issues*, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly noted that, 'those who gave evidence to the inquiry strongly believed that the Northern Ireland Assembly and...Executive need to further enhance relationships with the various European institutions. This would enable Northern Ireland to play a more active role in the shaping of European policy and to benefit from the opportunities that Europe provides' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010). The Committee highlighted the importance of prioritising European issues and actively participating in the development of European legislation and policies of relevance to Northern Ireland (ibid).

Chapter 3 outlined the importance of the European level to peace-making and peace-keeping efforts in Northern Ireland, particularly to funding local charities and voluntary groups to undertake vital work at the grassroots community level. It detailed the shift from PEACE I, which acknowledged and resourced community sector work for social and political development; to PEACE II, in which macro-economic and political changes became the dominant peace-building strategy over alternative grassroots 'civil society' approaches, with greater emphasis placed on funding to foster reconciliation (NICVA, 2012: 6). Meanwhile



PEACE III (2007-2013), 'carried forward a number of key aspects from the previous programmes and again places a strong emphasis on reconciliation' (ibid).

Research by NICVA has shown that the change to empowering councils to deliver PEACE III funds has embedded a more bureaucratic and controlling culture; negatively impacting on effective project delivery, and very limited funding from government departments or statutory agencies to continue supporting projects at the completion of PEACE funding (NICVA, 2012: 8-9). This bureaucratic burden had an impact on the community and voluntary sector's ability to exploit fully the financial opportunities of PEACE funding, as Martina Anderson MLA noted, 'Through consultations that took place during the developmental stage of Peace III, it was difficult for groups that were struggling to cope with Peace II to understand the implications of Peace III...People felt the impact of Peace III only when it was too late to invoke any European intervention' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010). Tony McCusker, Chair of the Community Relations Council, commented on the audit process of PEACE funding in an OFMDFM Committee meeting on a possible PEACE IV, 'you end up investing in a lot of organisations, and they spend a lot of their time on fairly basic administration rather than actually putting the resources to the front line' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2012).

A Committee member also highlighted the problem of political leadership in the consociational system in relation to the Northern Ireland peace agenda at the European level, 'the lack of agreement in the Assembly on what peace and reconciliation looks like must make it incredibly challenging at times to deliver this work on the ground' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2012). Indeed, NICVA cite both undue political influence that at times overlooks social issues in favour of business interests, and a lack of Assembly leadership directing the peace and reconciliation agenda (NICVA, 2012: 16). Moreover, recent Assembly Question and Answer sessions with the First Minister have pointed to potential obstacles to securing a PEACE IV programme, located in a wider British narrative about Europe. A proposed €150 million programme is going before the European Parliament for approval, however the current Conservative Party position on Europe has meant that, 'the United Kingdom Government found themselves in a difficult position — one might say, "Hoist by their own petard" — in that they were asking for a reduction in the Budget and therefore found it difficult to ask for an increase by applying for Peace IV funds' (First Minister Peter Robinson, OFMDFM, 2013a).

Women's groups have received some PEACE funding, where projects have been designed to meet the criteria of building positive relations at the local level, acknowledging the past, creating shared public spaces and developing key institutional capacity for a shared society (NICVA, 2012: 6). This is evident in the WRDA's delivery of a project under PEACE III in partnership with the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the National Women's Council of Ireland, which aims to, 'capture the experiences of women living through conflict and through the subsequent period of conflict resolution and peace building' (Lynch, 2012: 2). The programme endeavours to design policy recommendations focused on influencing institutional change in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with regard to gender and peace-building, and develop a Toolkit on women and peace building that can be used more widely at the global level in situations of conflict (ibid). This shows evidence of linking ties to the EU via PEACE funds being used to generate intellectual resources for influencing policy both domestically and internationally.

However, Margaret Ward revealed that the terms on which these resources are offered dictate the nature of work undertaken by women's groups in receipt of funds. She noted that whereas, 'you really found a flowering of women's groups through PEACE I, because the

criterion wasn't as set down in terms of cross-community work' (Interview: 28 June 2011), PEACE III funding has seen a marked change with, 'the endless training that goes on because that's what you can actually get money for...a lot of the rural women would have said that, the Rural Women's Network; community development work is not the work that gets funded, it's this other work' (Interview: 20 November 2012). Thus, linking ties to EU institutions via direct funding has yielded some piecemeal gains, but again, the project-linked funding is tied to goals established by the EU and MLAs who may not prioritise social issues and community development within 'single identity' communities, in which women's groups are concentrated (Interview, Margaret Ward: 28 June 2011).

With the shift away from any significant resourcing of the voluntary sector from the EU without punitive restrictions or a significant bureaucratic burden, sustained women's movement engagement comes through voluntary networks of the pan-European women's movement. Indeed, in the OFMDFM Committee's report of its Inquiry into consideration of European Issues, NIWEP representatives encouraged Northern Ireland's political institutions to make use of the extensive bridging networks already established: 'We commend to you the opportunity to use NIWEP...NICVA and other organisations that have European expertise and an international focus. We can offer...our experience of working with other European member states...the Committee has an opportunity to benefit from the relationships that have been built' (Liz Law in Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010).

As demonstrated in section 2, from the 1980s the women's movement was active in forming and shaping European networks, from establishing NIWEP to work within the European Women's Lobby (EWL), to contributing to the establishment of the European Anti-Poverty Network (Interview, Bronagh Hinds: 28 June 2011). It is through such networks that the women's movement focuses its European lobbying efforts; most notably through EWL, the largest umbrella organisation of women's groups in the EU. As with the WNC relationship and UN engagement, involvement with EWL is channelled through NIWEP. NIWEP, in turn, is part of the UK Joint Committee on Women (UKJCW), a consortium with a nation-wide representative umbrella group in Scotland, England and Wales respectively, with a designated UK delegate to EWL from one of the four nations on a rotating basis.

EWL serves both bridging and linking functions. It lobbies at the European level to provide a gender perspective and information to decision-makers about women's rights and needs, and facilitates the participation of women's organisations at EU level; thus it, 'plays a dual role as a link between women's organisations and institutions' (EWL, 2010). EWL receives 83 per cent of its funding from the European Commission's PROGRESS programme; as such, Strid argues that EWL has acquired, 'somewhat of a representative monopoly in terms of opportunities to influence EU policy-making through the various channels of consultation' (Strid, 2009: 5). Strid locates EWL within the European Commission's larger process of sourcing and establishing legitimacy through consulting organised interests, 'organised interests are, in some respects, the only constituency available to the EU supranational institution...they act as gatekeepers of national level organised interests' (ibid: 240).

The authority vested in EWL therefore rests in the European Commission's preferred policy-making process; fostering civil society organisations into confederations with which it can consult in a singular fashion (Strid, 2009: 242). For the Northern Ireland women's movement, this has a positive result both for bridging ties with women's movements across the UK and for linking ties at the European level. It facilitates the further use of the pincer movement; a means by which the movement can bring European policy norms to bear in its

lobbying of both the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster. Moreover, strong bridging ties with the EWL provide a secondary and external level of support for policy change in Northern Ireland. For instance, EWL submitted a consultation response to Lord Morrow MLA's Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill, tabled on 24 June 2013, to address human trafficking and the demand for sexual services. The author notes that EWL, 'welcomes Northern Ireland's political initiative on the issue and hopes that this consultation will lead Northern Ireland to adopt a political commitment to protect all women from all forms of violence and achieve equality...by abolishing the system of prostitution and making it a crime to buy sex. Such commitment would be instrumental to give the example of policies to be adopted in all United Kingdom' (EWL, 2012a: 1). This underpinned similar responses by women's organisations in Northern Ireland (see Women's Aid NI, 2013), thereby providing a European-wide position of solidarity and evidence-based support (see EWL, 2012b and EWL, 2014).

The pincer movement is clearly demonstrated in engagement through the UKJCW mechanism: the UKJCW feeds into the EWL response to the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth, in which as part of their commitment to achieving the Europe 2020 goals, member states submit National Reform Programmes outlining their structural reform plans every year. The UKJCW submitted comments to EWL on the engagement with and outcome of the 2012 National Reform Programme, and on the UK's engagement with NGOs around the 2013 National Reform Programme. The UKJCW's response sought to 'gender' the UK government's growth strategy, noting that, 'the negative gendered impacts of implementation of the CSRs [Country Specific Recommendations] principally arise from the fact that the process of producing the CSRs, and the content of the CSRs, is not gendered. The differential impact on women of pursuing neoliberal economic policies is not considered' (UKJCW, 2012: 3-4). The response highlights gendered impacts of economic policies in each of the devolved nations; for instance: 'The years between 2003 and 2009 saw a year on year decrease in childcare places in Northern Ireland while provision in the rest of the UK has increased' (ibid: 5). NIWEP's position within the UKJCW and leadership function on behalf of the NI movement serves as a further platform from which bridging ties at the UK level facilitate European engagement, in order to leverage influence with domestic policy-making.

Therefore, the structured, UK-wide means with which the Northern Ireland women's movement engages with the EWL as 'preferred' European Commission partner suggests the deployment of bridging ties developed as a UK movement to the European level. The WNC abolition has weakened bridging social capital between women's movements in the Four Nations, thereby undermining the ability of devolved nation women's movements to use a UK-wide mechanism to influence Westminster policy. However, the UKJCW structure and referred authority as the UK mechanism for feeding into EWL, and by extension, EU policy, demands an ongoing process of collaboration across the Four Nations. Of course, whilst this mechanism does facilitate attempts to generate a UK-wide women's movement position to be fed into lobbying at the European level, as well as devolved nation-specific matters, the success of this strategy for advancing the aims of the NI women's movement relies upon effective partnership within the UKJCW in particular, and a willingness to engage the European level more generally amongst the Northern Ireland movement.

However, interview sources suggest that despite the high degree of leadership agency driving interaction with the European policy-making arena through EWL, linking ties have not been effectively established. Kate McCullough pointed to a lack of UK-wide awareness and

collective action through the UKJCW, despite Liz Law's position on EWL's Board, 'I sometimes wonder...how much do they know they can influence Liz in her work by giving her info to feed in; how do we shore that up' (Interview: 21 June 2011). Whilst the mandate for the UKJCW in relation to EWL is clear, its role in representing the women's movement beyond the EWL arena is limited, not least because the resources needed to fund an effective Four Nations women's organisation are not forthcoming (ibid). Kate pointed to functional constraints on the UKJCW's effectiveness: 'I think that sometimes personalities within the UK Joint Committee are difficult, and at times very frustrating...I think that there needs to be shifting of people in and out so that it's not always the same people' (Interview: 10 December 2013). In my role at NAWO (the organisation representing England on the UKJCW), observing the interactions between UKJCW members and in email correspondence has demonstrated the difficulties encountered in integrating this un-resourced work into already stretched schedules and workloads, and the tensions that can arise from personal disagreements and organisational constraints. The un-resourced, voluntary nature of a UKJCW that is the sole preserve of four 'representative' organisations (in which most individuals associated with these organisations are working voluntarily themselves) means that influence and authority becomes vested in particular individuals; as such, breaking the pattern of dysfunctional professional relationships can present a challenge and the role of leaders inhibits effectiveness.

The impact of a constrained UKJCW, as the mechanism for UK women's organisations to feed into EWL, was explored by Margaret Ward: 'One of the problems with NIWEP is that although it's part of the European Women's Lobby, because it doesn't have the resources to really disseminate that information, what NIWEP's doing in going to meetings et cetera isn't known, at all. Until NIWEP get resources to do more, it's CEDAW really that NIWEP will be known for' (Interview: 30 November 2012). As Kate McCullough concluded, even NIWEP themselves can be ambivalent about their leadership position as the Northern Ireland UKJCW representative: 'I think the sector doesn't take it seriously enough – I think that's number one. We would promote it, but sometimes we don't...We would tend to push the UN stuff, the 1325 stuff, when we're out and about with those in power who should listen, instead of pushing the UK Joint Committee' (Interview: 10 December 2013).

Ann Marie Gray echoed the sentiment about lack of resources in her evidence to the OFMDFM European Inquiry Committee, 'we are an NGO and most of the work is carried out by volunteers, yet we have still managed to achieve consultative status at the UN and UK expert representation at the European Women's Lobby. However, the issue is about how organisations can be expected to carry out this high-level policy work without being adequately resourced.' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010). Margaret Ward did not believe that the women's movement more widely engages with the European level in any meaningful sense, stating that, 'the fact that Europe can be debating representation and all sorts of issues, and so much emanates from Europe; I don't think people would understand that linkage really' (Interview: 10 December 2013). This is in stark contrast to the energy and enthusiasm with which the women's movement engaged with Europe during the Women's Coalition period as depicted by Bronagh Hinds:

The European agenda was really, really important...there'd been a lot of women's community groups started, because of the European agenda on women in decision-making...So we ran this big joint conference between NIWEP and the National Women's Council of Ireland; we ran one thing in the European Commission office in

Dublin linking women in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and southern Ireland and women in Brussels from the European Women's Lobby there...The voluntary sector was already creating those relationships with Government, and that was using the European dimension (Interview: 28 June 2011).

This description of engagement with the European level reflects a period when the voluntary sector were deriving real financial benefits from PEACE funds, with the women's movement able to resource efforts to establish bridging and linking ties with Ireland, across the UK, and at the European level. Moreover, the bridging and linking capital being accrued by the women's movement through European networks appears to be having little meaningful benefit at the domestic level, both in raising the profile of women's groups and their actions at the European level, and for advancing linking ties with policy makers. As Bronagh Hinds noted in her evidence to the OFMDFM European Inquiry Committee, 'some groups, such as NIWEP and others, are beavering away and making links or representing Northern Ireland in Europe...but there is not sufficient mapping of that. Neither is there sufficient co-ordination of that, sufficient knowledge of that being shared or sufficient use being made of that' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010). Ultimately, with the decline in PEACE funding to the voluntary sector and as the evidence presented above shows, the women's movement has largely directed its efforts away from establishing linking ties at the European level. It relies instead upon the under-resourced UKJCW structure to represent their interests through the EWL link. However, unlike the WNC relationship, limited resources and a lack of wider women's movement buy-in to the European agenda means that NIWEP is unable to exercise effective leadership agency through the UKJCW, in order to generate social capital as a communal resource for the women's movement.

## **5. Linking ties to the UN and engagement with the international gender equality agenda**

### **a. CEDAW**

Evidence for linking ties at the European level has shown them to exist in a fragmented and piecemeal manner, notably the relationship with EWL and European engagement via PEACE funds. Structures for input and influence exist as part of a wider UK arrangement, but interaction is mediated through leaders from a single organisation which does not have the resources to engage the wider Northern Ireland women's movement in meaningful participation in efforts to influence European policy, nor to work towards creating a more effective and representative UK-wide structure through which to lobby and influence. However, evidence will show that outside the immediate political environment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is the international gender equality agenda with which the women's movement have most actively engaged and sought linking ties in order to exert influence both internationally and over the Northern Irish and UK governments.

The women's movement is actively engaged with the formal process of examination by the UN through CEDAW of the UK state, both by contributing to UK-wide Shadow reports (previously the WNC report, most recently the Women's Resource Centre report) and by collaborating as a movement to produce NIWEP's Shadow report. Shadow reports are the opportunity for civil society organisations to draw the Committee's attention to gaps in

government reporting and areas where improvements need to be made. In the UK, the two years in the lead up to the submission of the Government report is one of lobbying, dialogue and consultation between Westminster, devolved administrations, the women's movement and wider human rights community. For the NI women's movement, CEDAW represents a vital mechanism with which to both engage the UK and Northern Ireland governments on policies that have particular relevance to Northern Ireland, and to petition the CEDAW Committee to highlight deficiencies in the UK government's approach to gender matters in Northern Ireland.

The closely-networked involvement with CEDAW, led by NIWEP, demonstrates the extent to which bridging social capital has facilitated engagement beyond what might be expected of a relatively small domestic movement through effective leadership agency and a clear and consensus-driven strategy. At the 41<sup>st</sup> CEDAW session in 2008 at which the UK government were examined, twelve organisations from UK civil society groups submitted shadow reports (surpassing the number submitted by the other seven countries under examination at the session), including the WNC and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. However, six of the twelve reports came from Northern Irish organisations, including NIWEP and the FPA (the leading sexual health charity), whilst the WNC's report dealt extensively with issues exclusive to Northern Ireland, such as abortion.

The NIWEP Shadow report acknowledged the involvement of 23 voluntary organisations, including the most active women's policy organisations and women's centres (NIWEP, 2008). As Margaret Ward noted, 'NIWEP is in the position of being our outward-facing organisation'; it coordinates the work of the movement as a whole on international engagement (Interview: 28 June 2011). Activity around international gender equality mechanisms, particularly CEDAW, is therefore a clear example of bridging social capital, with women's groups collaborating in a process of ongoing engagement. Comments from interviewees also highlight the women's movement's tactical deployment of international mechanisms and global norms to lobby the Northern Ireland government on issues with which they may wish to otherwise not engage.

Whilst NIWEP's European work is under-resourced and under-exploited by women's groups seeking to influence policy-making, the movement as a whole participates in the collection of information for the NIWEP Shadow report. Lynn Carvill explained that NIWEP's CEDAW work is part of a movement-wide strategic engagement:

I think the strongest tool we have is CEDAW; I think because of the organisation and people within it, NIWEP, they have ensured that people are informed. They don't just say 'this is CEDAW and we'll look at it again in 5 years', younger women coming through or people coming in from different sectors, always have the opportunity – really they have to be commended. They share, and that makes people aware; and when people are aware, they're off to the politicians. It's a piece of dynamic work that is always ongoing and always inclusive (Interview: 22 June 2011).

Similarly, Patricia Haren commented that instruments like CEDAW are, '[what] we have to remind the powers that be that we're an area coming out of conflict. You might want to treat us as a normal region but we're not. We depend on NIWEP, having the expertise to draw up the report; we do the focus groups and work with them' (Interview: 5 July 2011). CEDAW has the profile within the movement to ensure that it stays on the agenda as a lobbying tool. NIWEP acts effectively as lead partner and plays a crucial role in mobilising collectively-held

social capital through leadership agency; directing the movement's engagement with the process and thus using its nodal position as the experienced UN interlocutor for the movement to activate bridging ties and manage the process of establishing links at this level.

This was manifestly the case before, during and after the Examination of the UK's seventh periodic report to the CEDAW Committee in July 2013, which I attended as a NAWO representative. I observed the extent to which NIWEP take a leadership and coordinating role amongst the Northern Ireland organisations who attend the CEDAW Examination, which NIWEP itself set out in a pre-session submission to the Committee: 'NIWEP is the co-ordinating organisation for [a] report which is based on consultations with our wide membership, input from expert NGOs and other bodies and our monitoring and analysis of the implementation of Committee's 2008 recommendations' (NIWEP, 2012: 1). In line with comments made by interviewees above, NIWEP presents itself to the CEDAW Committee as an NGO leader and expert with regard to CEDAW.

Documentary evidence points to a strategic ongoing engagement with the CEDAW process wherever opportunities are available. In its submission on the list of issues for the CEDAW Committee pre-session working group meeting in Geneva in October 2012, NIWEP drew out both a central problematic of engaging international mechanisms to effect change in Northern Ireland through UK Government action, and an argument for this very engagement: 'The existence of devolution in the UK does not detract from the responsibilities of Westminster Government with regard to the implementation of the various human rights conventions although Government attempts to argue (as it does in its most recent report to the CEDAW Committee) that responsibility rests with devolved governments' (NIWEP, 2012: 2).

Whilst the UK government continues to assert that it is not responsible for devolved matters such as the application of UNSCR 1325 and abortion, it is singularly answerable to the UN, and the CEDAW Committee remains unmoved by claims of devolved exceptionalism. As NIWEP's report makes clear, 'the existence of devolution is used to justify the absence of a national action plan on CEDAW with clear outcome related targets. However, the Westminster government has ultimate responsibility for the application of the Convention *throughout* the UK' (NIWEP, 2012: 2). This report encourages the CEDAW Committee to ask the UK government about a range of issues of particular relevance to Northern Ireland, including welfare reform, childcare, UNSCR 1325 and women in decision-making.

In addition to their contribution on behalf of the NI women's movement to the UK NGO CEDAW Working Group shadow report for the 2013 CEDAW Examination, NIWEP produce a shadow report in response to the UK government's report ahead of each Examination every four years (on average). It brings together contributions from the women's movement and other expert groups in Northern Ireland. NIWEP note that progress in relation to the previous Concluding Observations (2008) with specific Northern Ireland relevance has been extremely limited, emphasising that a crucial link has been lost, 'since the abolition of the WNC, the UK government has in fact taken progressively less responsibility for the implementation of the Convention and less of a role in bringing about gender equality in Northern Ireland' (NIWEP, 2013a: 10). Moreover, NIWEP gave an oral statement to the CEDAW Committee at the 2013 UK Examination – NGOs have a short time slot before the Government statement to the Committee; an NGO representative speaks for Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England respectively. Ann Marie Gray highlighted four key issues and asked the Committee to draw attention to: women's public and political participation, the impact of welfare reform policy on

women, critical issues relating to ethnic minority and traveller women in Northern Ireland, women's right to reproductive health care (NIWEP, 2013a: 26).

Following the UK's statement and examination, NIWEP continued their efforts to see such key issues reflected in strong Concluding Observations. NGOs can submit Concluding Observation recommendations to the Committee shortly after the Examination and before the official report. NIWEP used this opportunity to make recommendations, but also to challenge responses during the Examination: 'It should be noted that in response to many of the questions asked by the Committee on core areas of social policy...when the government referred to the 'UK' in its response it was frequently referring only to England...thereby not acknowledging differences in policies and provision across the four nations' (NIWEP, 2013b: 1). The example of women's representation in public and political life is given: 'None of the measures aimed at improving women's public and political participation cited by the government reflect the UK as a whole...No positive actions or temporary special measures have been introduced in NI' (ibid: 3). The CEDAW process focuses attention on a government's progress or retreat on gender equality domestically; it thus provides a forum for the NI women's movement to advocate for domestic policy change at an international level, a particularly useful mechanism when avenues for UK-wide debate have been diminished and Westminster accountability for gender equality in Northern Ireland continues to be minimal.

Quotes from interviewees and documentary evidence therefore show the women's movement using CEDAW as a tool with international legitimacy to lobby the UK government to, in turn, put pressure on the Northern Ireland executive. Evidence from successive UK examinations show the CEDAW Committee's focus on seeing progress with regard to reproductive rights: it has called on the British government to address the disparity in access to reproductive health care between NI women and women elsewhere in the UK, both in its Concluding Observations at the 2008 Examination, and in its preparatory questions ahead of the 2013 Examination (UN CEDAW, 2012: 4). At the UK's 2013 Examination, the CEDAW Committee once again drew attention to the disparity and placed it in the context of a wider women's human rights agenda, noting that according to the law in Northern Ireland, 'it was only possible to have access to abortion in cases of severe threat to the women's life. The most recent guidelines were even more restrictive than the current law. Was the United Kingdom Government planning any reform with regards to the current situation in line with the recommendations of human rights bodies on this?' (UN OHCHR, 2013: 10). The Concluding Observations again called for policy change, 'in line with general recommendation No. 24 on women and health and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the State party should expedite the amendment of the anti-abortion law in Northern Ireland with a view to decriminalise abortion' (UN CEDAW, 2013: 9). This issue has proven intractable at the domestic political level, and having the weight of international norms and a UN examination process enables the NI women's movement to deploy the 'pincer movement' with regard to the Northern Ireland and UK governments.

Eileen Sung, the former Head of Gender and Sexual Orientation Equality at OFMDFM, noted the effectiveness of the women's movement's commitment to utilising international gender mechanisms: 'It is amazing the awareness of CEDAW, the awareness of United Nations treaties. The women's sector is sustainable in terms of how it keeps those international obligations alive...that is driven, sustained by the women's sector, and it would not happen if it wasn't' (Interview: 28 June 2011). This suggests a relationship between the women's movement and Northern Ireland government that, in the context of the international gender



equality agenda, is characterised not by compliance and cooperation, but by pressure and to the women's movement deploying what Marian Sawer (2007: 25) has called the politics of embarrassment; using the profile and visibility of the international setting to further the movement's aims. Moreover, CEDAW represents a powerful tool for the women's movement in their interaction with the Northern Ireland and UK governments, by providing a legitimate framework for lobbying on issues that have been closed down by politicians. As Ann Marie Gray noted, 'even though they're saying 1325 doesn't apply to Northern Ireland...with CEDAW they still have to answer questions about it' (Interview: 27 November 2012).

Westminster is therefore ultimately answerable for issues raised by the CEDAW Committee irrespective of devolution, although that has been the default UK response to questions about reproductive rights, for example. The politics of embarrassment plays a critical role here for women's movement leaders when they are able to win the CEDAW Committee to their side of a particular position; Ann Marie Gray recalled that at the 2008 Examination in which the UK Government were strongly advised to remove punitive provisions on women who undergo an abortion and to instigate a public consultation on the abortion law (UN CEDAW, 2008: 11), neither the UK government nor the Northern Ireland Executive appreciated the degree of attention that would be given to Northern Ireland issues, 'I don't think they had the wit last time to be worried until the last minute, because they weren't quite sure how terrible it was going to be until the CEDAW Committee responded to the issues paper' (Interview: 27 November 2012). As a result, the response ahead of the 2013 Examination from Northern Ireland officials was quite different, including greater consultation with the Gender Advisory Panel because, 'they're nervous about the same thing happening again as happened the last time...both governments in Westminster and Northern Ireland are a bit concerned. And the Equality Officers [from each Department]...said well we need stuff on CEDAW again' (Interview, Ann Marie Gray: 27 November 2012).

CEDAW therefore offers an opportunity for the women's movement to use an international examination mechanism, which has advocated change in some of the movement's key policy concerns, to apply pressure to the Northern Ireland and UK governments and give a profile to Northern Ireland-specific issues that may otherwise be lost in UK-wide reporting. Discussions at the final WNC Northern Ireland partners' meeting in December 2010 demonstrate the extent to which the movement have mainstreamed CEDAW in the breadth of their lobbying. In the aftermath of the 2011 Assembly elections, partners agreed to send information about CEDAW to MLAs and local councillors, with the possibility of running a conference for new MLAs, and to hold events in the regions to raise awareness about CEDAW. However, whilst the evidence presented above suggests that Northern Ireland officials are engaging with CEDAW in a more informed and consultative fashion, it has yet to be seen whether the women's movement can claim to have achieved progress on its fundamental aims.

Certainly, the evidence shows a movement which has capitalised upon the opportunity for leaders to create linking ties at the UN level to increase chances for influencing policy at home, and the greater level of consultation by the Northern Ireland Executive through the Gender Advisory Panel and training of officials points to the development of linking ties between the women's movement and policy-makers around CEDAW. Positive domestic policy developments can be tied to the success of the women's movement's engagement with CEDAW and international linking ties, with Ann Marie Gray observing that, 'I think CEDAW has had a bearing on trying to get a childcare strategy out before the Examination' (Interview: 27

November 2012). Nonetheless, the power of statements made by the CEDAW Committee around reproductive rights is diluted by the ability of the UK government to claim, 'this is devolution so this gets us off the hook' (ibid). However, the UK's legal responsibilities can be addressed through the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which entered into force in 2000 and in which individual or groups of women can submit claims of rights violations protected under the Convention to the Committee, or for the Committee to instigate an Inquiry into situations of grave or systematic women's rights violations.

It is unclear what impact the Optional Protocol mechanism will have for progressing reproductive rights in Northern Ireland. At the final WNC Northern Ireland partners' meeting, a representative from Alliance for Choice, an organisation which campaigns for the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, outlined work to instigate an Inquiry under the Optional Protocol into lack of access to abortion in Northern Ireland. A report was submitted on 9 December 2010; by November 2012, Ann Marie Gray commented that a judgement is still pending, 'they came back a couple of months ago to say that the CEDAW Committee has considered it...and that they were going to be in touch for further information...they're taking it seriously' (Interview: 27 November 2012). She noted that with the Examination pending in 2013, it is unlikely that the Committee will make a judgement, but will instead use the fact of the Inquiry to apply pressure to the UK government in its questions about reproductive rights. Whilst the request for an inquiry is still pending, this nevertheless demonstrates the added value of using the pincer movement at the international level to progress change domestically, particularly when the 'partner' in these efforts has international legitimacy and can engender international scrutiny and debate amongst and between both the UK and Northern Ireland governments.

However, in the absence of any existing evidence showing the Optional Protocol as a force for eliciting action from the British and Northern Ireland governments, the women's movement's ability to influence policy change is further undermined by the nature of devolution. As seen above, Westminster can claim that it is not responsible for such matters as reproductive rights, and it has not exhibited any perceived need in CEDAW Examinations to justify the lack of pressure exerted on the Northern Ireland Assembly. This is evident beyond CEDAW; the UK underwent a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2012, a process through which the human rights records of UN member states are scrutinised across the whole range of their UN human rights commitments. In a UPR recommendation lodged by Finland, that the UK, 'ensure by legislative and other measures that women in Northern Ireland are entitled to safe and legal abortion on equal basis with women living in other parts of the United Kingdom', the UK denied the recommendation's validity, stating that, 'the legislative position has been different in the separate jurisdictions for many years, and any changes to the law in this area are a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive' (Ministry of Justice, 2012: 39). As stated above, then, the UK government continues to resist international pressure and the 'politics of embarrassment' with regard to reproductive rights, by maintaining its lack of legislative responsibility.

The UK government's approach to consultation for the UPR suggests an indifference to devolution and devolved nations' voluntary sectors. At a Ministry of Justice meeting to consult the community and voluntary sector about the UPR's mid-term review which I attended as a NAWO representative, no groups from Northern Ireland were present, with minimal representation from the other devolved nations. As such, the NI women's movement has engaged with the CEDAW Examination process in a collaborative and effective manner, both

through the agency of NIWEP leaders to represent its interests to the UN and by mainstreaming CEDAW throughout policy interactions at the domestic level to raise the profile of issues specific to Northern Irish women and to increase awareness amongst officials. However, the achievement of desired policy outcomes is inhibited by Westminster's ability to cite devolved responsibility where possible, and the Northern Ireland Executive's wish to maintain the status quo. Linking social capital at the UN level, whilst existent and supportive, has not precipitated noticeable policy gains at the domestic level for the women's movement despite a high degree of leadership agency and concerted engagement amongst the women's movement in general.

A high degree of collaboration, even cohesiveness, has characterised the women's movement's engagement with the CEDAW examination process under NIWEP leadership, however developments in recent years suggest the existence of fragmentation in relation to CEDAW within both the Northern Ireland movement and the wider UK movement. At the UK level, the abolition of the WNC has removed secure funding for Four Nations work around CEDAW. The WRC-led UK CEDAW Working Group did not have the financial resources to ensure the kind of sustained and embedded participation of devolved nations' women's movements that the WNC could ensure both financially and through the presence of devolved nations Commissioners. As Ann Marie Gray explained, 'the work [the WRC have] been doing is amazing, but I can't go to lots of those meetings...With the WNC there were always Northern Ireland people there; we were able to feed the stuff through to [the NI Commissioner], and it got into the report...resources all around are tighter; it's just resourcing really, it's more work' (Interview: 27 November 2013).

Further, the singularity of message that came with NIWEP's largely uncontested leadership of the NI women's movement's shadow reporting process has been challenged by the granting in 2012 of UN ECOSOC Status to the Training for Women Network (TWN)<sup>5</sup>, and subsequent submission of a 'rival' shadow report, with contributions from 21 organisations. This appears to be part of a new strategic engagement by TWN with UN mechanisms, including successfully applying for ECOSOC status, which allows NGOs to accredit representatives to attend UN conferences and examinations:

They went and seriously stepped on the toes of NIWEP recently – they've got some UN status for something, out of the blue, which takes a long time to get... [NIWEP] are organising very much on a voluntary basis around expertise around people and a huge amount of passion...So that can be dangerous, because unless you're actually going to do something, ok. But if you're not going to do anything it's not so good; there's a bit of smoke and mirrors going on. That would be a concern at the moment I suppose from [NIWEP's] point of view, and from the wider sector (Interview, Lynn Carvill: 27 November 2012).

This is supported by Kate McCullough, 'their role is really about training. For some reason they have now begun to see themselves as the lead' (Interview: 10 December 2013). There is therefore evidence to suggest that the level of consensus attested to by interviewees that exists around NIWEP leadership of CEDAW engagement has been challenged and is producing

---

<sup>5</sup> I contacted TWN during fieldwork in Northern Ireland to request an interview but was unable to secure a response.

a degree of tension that could dilute the movement's ability to sustain strong bridging and linking ties through clear and effective leadership agency. Engagement in the CEDAW process has been effective because, at least in part and as suggested by interviewees, NIWEP has representative authority from other movement leaders to manage and activate collectively-held social capital, to put the pincer movement into effect by shoring up linking ties. A leadership challenge from another organisation may serve to weaken consensus and undermine NIWEP leaders' agency in managing the deployment of UN linking ties to embed and extend arguments for domestic change.

#### **b. UNSCR 1325**

Engagement with debates about UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has similarly become a principal instrument in the women's movement's utilisation of international mechanisms to pursue change at the domestic level. 1325 was passed in 2000, and its emphasis on the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts, stressing of the importance of their equal participation in the maintenance and promotion of peace and the need to increase their role in decision-making, has made 1325 a useful lobbying tool and policy goal for the women's movement. It has been used to argue for greater gender mainstreaming in Northern Irish policy-making and political life, and for efforts to be made to increase women's political representation.

As Ann Marie Gray explained in her evidence to the OFMDFM European Inquiry Committee, 'We believe that it is central to the progression of women's issues on lots of levels. In Northern Ireland, there are many examples of good practice of women being centrally involved in peace building during conflict, as well as post-conflict. However, we feel that that...it is time that it is acknowledged here' (Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010). Crucially, 1325 offers an internationally-sanctioned platform for the women's movement to lobby the Government on the rights of Northern Irish women coming out of conflict. Moreover, its emphasis on gender mainstreaming enables the movement to lobby for greater participation of women in political and civil life, 'it is about the involvement of women in the resolution of conflict, negotiation and peace building. There are also an inadequate number of women who are board members of public bodies, and even fewer women chair public bodies. All those areas have been identified under resolution 1325, as well as women's involvement in peace building' (Bronagh Hinds in Committee for the OFMDFM, 2010).

As part of its implementation of 1325's recommendations, Westminster published a National Action Plan (NAP) in November 2010 and issued a revised version in February 2012. The failure of either NAP to mention Northern Ireland stems from a historic UK position that does not recognise the Troubles as a conflict. As Monica McWilliams commented, 'the United Kingdom wrote its 1325 for Sierra Leone and Iraq and all the countries it's involved in either donating to or has military in; it never looked to Northern Ireland, even though we were in its backyard' (Interview: 26 November 2012). For the women's movement, applying 1325 to Northern Ireland would mean the application of 1325's recommendations about women's political representation and gender equality mainstreaming in post-conflict political institutions; it therefore has the potential to impact meaningfully at the domestic level. As such, the women's movement has challenged the legal foundations of the non-applicability argument (Interview, Margaret Ward: 28 June 2011). This legal advice dismissed the argument that 1325 does not apply because the Troubles do not meet a 'technical legal definition' of a

conflict, noting that, 'even a cursory reading of 1325 demonstrates the irrelevance of this argument': '1325 does not apply only to situations of "armed conflict"...[it] applies to all "conflict situations" – which includes "armed conflicts" but also embraces many other types of situation...In other words, 1325 applies to Northern Ireland, regardless of the technical legal category into which the conflict is deemed to have fallen' (WRDA, 2011).

The utility of 1325 for providing external legitimacy for the aims of the women's movement around political representation and mainstreaming has therefore been seen and referenced widely in lobbying, and in the establishment of an All Party Group (APG) on 1325 in the Northern Ireland Assembly, to mirror the Associate Parliamentary Group (APG) on Women, Peace and Security in Westminster. One can see the desire to have a gender perspective mainstreamed into a post-conflict society reflected in the women's movement strategy of 'mainstreaming' calls for 1325 implementation into their policy and lobbying work at the domestic level as a whole. Such calls to implement 1325 are made across a diverse spread of policy responses, including in a WCRP report into social exclusion and deprivation of women (WCRP, 2009), in a NIRWN consultation response to an EU Communication on the Common Agricultural Policy (NIRWN, 4), and in the WSN's response to the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (WSN, 2010). Linking ties at the UN level have also brought support for the application of 1325 from leading institutional figures. Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, noted in her statement following a 16-day mission to the UK that:

[W]omen in Northern Ireland have been marginalized from the peace building processes, and their experiences of violence during and after the conflict has been mostly unrecognized. Calls have been made by a number of international human rights mechanisms for the implementations of...1325. Such implementation would include the development of National Action Plans (NAP) and other national level strategies in Northern Ireland to ensure the increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making (UN OHCHR, 2014: 8).

Interview evidence supports the argument that 1325 is part of the women's movement's engagement with the international gender equality agenda to exert pressure for domestic change. Ann Marie Gray explained that the women's movement, 'definitely see it as useful, and now it would be a rare consultation response that wouldn't mention the international conventions or something like 1325, so inevitably that probably raises awareness amongst policy-makers' (Interview: 27 November 2012). Indeed, interview material points to the development of linking social capital with policy-makers at the Assembly around 1325, in a similar fashion to CEDAW. Ann Marie Gray described one of the ways in which the women's movement has been creating a dialogue with policy-makers about international mechanisms and relating their principles to the Northern Ireland context, 'the work Bronagh has been doing with women in local councils has been interesting...her DemocraShe project; she brings up 1325 and links that to CEDAW...she has been able to get that onto the agenda' (ibid).

This has been further institutionalised within the Assembly, with the establishment and running by NIWEP of the APG on 1325, which held its first meeting on 30 June 2011. NIWEP established the APG in response to a proposed Inquiry to be held in 2011 and led by the Secretariat for Westminster's APG on extending the UK's NAP to Northern Ireland. In its Concept Note, the APG framed the need for an Inquiry in the context of an inadequate policy position from the UK government:

In a recent (May 2010) correspondence from the Government Equalities Office, the APG-WPS was informed: *"It is widely recognised that women have made an enormous contribution to the peace process in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years and we understand that the Northern Ireland Executive is exploring the possibility of taking action on this agenda."* This statement is vague and provides little further information that was previously available, and importantly gives no commitment for further measures to be taken (APG-WPS, 2010).

The Inquiry has galvanised political discussion on this topic, and significantly, does not absolve Westminster of responsibility for taking action, by strongly implying that this is indeed a matter for the UK government and not an issue of devolved responsibility. For the NI women's movement, it has provided a frame around which to embed 1325 in the Assembly. Emma Patterson-Bennett from NIWEP pointed to the buy in from all political parties, 'we've got all the parties...you don't have to have Green or Independent, you just have to have the four main parties, but it's nice to have them' (Interview: 28 November 2012).

This gives not only a structured environment for politicians to discuss the women, peace and security agenda, but also provides a platform for the development of linking ties between policy-makers and women's organisations. Emma Patterson-Bennett recalled that Hanna's House, an all-Ireland peace-building project, gave a presentation to the APG, 'loads of them came because they're so organised and they had about 30 women come up, and they all got photographs on the steps of Stormont. And loads of the MLAs turned up, because funnily enough when the Press come, everybody wants to be involved' (ibid); as well as a visit to the APG by a group of grassroots women involved with Women's Information Northern Ireland, an organisation that works to bring women together across the sectarian divide, 'all of these women came up...to the Assembly and it was just so much fun. They just didn't hold back, whatever they wanted to say – they were just shouting at the MLAs!' (ibid).

The APG therefore represents a structure for embedding and extending linking ties to the Assembly. However, interview evidence suggests that views on the tangible achievements of this strategy are mixed. Emma Patterson-Bennett commented that, 'it's funny because they all do get it, it's just getting their Parties to accept it' (Interview: 28 November 2012). The presence of a cross-party group does not signify cross-party commitment to progress on policy to effect positive change for gender equality. Emma Patterson-Bennett alluded to this distinction, noting that in order to attract MLAs to APG membership, 'we had to start from [a peace-building angle] and introduce the 'more women in your party' thing gradually' (ibid). Political will can therefore be mobilised around a peace and security narrative, but not around the implications for gender equality and women's political representation. Moreover, Margaret Ward attested to some fundamental weaknesses with the APG that, by implication, undermine the effectiveness of linking ties through this medium for advancing the movement's aims, 'the APG Group certainly isn't a powerful instrument from my experience of being at it recently; it's not well enough attended by politicians...the Assembly I would say would be the weakest link in some ways; we just don't have very good quality politicians quite frankly' (Interview: 30 November 2012).

Similarly, Catherine O'Rourke from the University of Ulster judged that the APG's impact on policy change is limited, 'it's certainly interesting that it exists. In terms of deliverables we've seen very little – they don't meet very often...it's not that a working group is developing

interesting policy; it's become a site where civil society talks to some MLAs about 1325. That's important, but that's really the limitation of that Group...politically no-one is willing to make the connection between 1325 and dealing with the past' (O'Rourke, 2013). The power to implement ultimately lies with Westminster and incorporation into its NAP, therefore Margaret Ward pointed to an alternative strategy of pursuing linking ties with the Irish Government around the issue of 1325 through Hanna's House work:

We've given evidence to the Good Friday Implementation Committee, which is a north-south committee but it meets in the Dáil. So Hanna's House gave evidence there on 1325, and as a result of that, speaking at the Hanna's House conference was John Barrett, who's the speaker in the Dáil. So he was speaking on behalf of the new British-Irish Parliamentary Forum...So it's actually a lot of our focus has been on the South, and the South maybe being able to have a bit of leverage on the North and the UK (Interview: 30 November 2012).

Interviews have also shown the nature of bridging and linking ties to Westminster, which can serve to both advance and hinder building a case for applying 1325 in Northern Ireland. As stated above, the APG was established to reflect the Westminster APG, for which GAPS (Gender Action for Peace and Security) are the Secretariat and lead work related to the UK government's NAP. NIWEP have therefore developed a relationship with GAPS, and have contributed work from a Northern Ireland position to GAPS-led consultations about reviewing the UK's NAP. Emma Patterson-Bennett explained that, 'as part of the GAPS work plan with the Associate Party Group, they decided in 2011 – and it's on their work plan, you can look it up which is probably what annoys me most – it says they will do an Inquiry into 1325's application to Northern Ireland. It's blatantly on their website as a commitment' (Interview: 10 December 2013).

A consultation process followed, in which Northern Ireland organisations submitted evidence and responses, only to be told that a full report could not be produced because a response had not been received from the FCO. There had also been no clear indication of when the Westminster Inquiry proposed by GAPS would take place, leading NIWEP to organise and run an Inquiry in Stormont in December 2013, 'we just decided we would run it, so we sent back a letter saying that we feel it's an opportune time, we're sorry you can't support us in this but we're going to go ahead without you...[GAPS said] go ahead, but don't call it a Westminster Inquiry, call it an Inquiry to Westminster and we would be happy to take the report afterwards' (ibid). The relationship to GAPS, who are the gatekeepers to the Westminster APG and the UK government's NAP, is therefore both important to the women's movement's work on 1325 and challenging to maintain in terms of transparency and consistency; even with strong leadership agency from NIWEP.

Emma Patterson-Bennett explained that GAPS refused to hold the Inquiry during the Haass talks in Northern Ireland, in which former US diplomat Richard Haass chaired cross-community talks on parades, flags and the past, despite calls from the women's movement, 'we wrote a letter and said we want the Inquiry to happen while Haass is here...it 100 per cent deals with 1325 and women's place in peace-building. The women's sector have met with Dr Meghan O'Sullivan who is Haass' right-hand woman and she has heard all this too...[they said] it's too sensitive of a time...which is ridiculous because he's here to deal with the sensitive issues' (interview: 10 December 2013). As such, Emma concluded that, 'I don't really know

where we stand now with GAPS with regards to membership, because obviously we've had no support. We've had no feed in to the review of the NAP apart from the standard bullet points that we were putting in every year since the beginning of time...I'm not sure if they've been incorporated this year' (ibid). Emma noted that there is no funding from GAPS to ensure participation from the NI movement at 1325 events in London, restricting NIWEP's ability to contribute and exercise agency as leaders on behalf of the women's movement to ensure Northern Ireland's inclusion in the UK-wide gender, peace and security agenda.

Evidence from Emma Patterson-Bennett indicates that support for the Northern Ireland women's movement's case for 1325 was forthcoming from GAPS member organisations, 'I did hear that all the other members of GAPS welcome Northern Ireland and a 1325 Inquiry...how can GAPS then not do it when they have a lot of members who believe that they should do it?' She suggested that resistance to moving the agenda forward lies in a UK government agenda that is going unchallenged by GAPS, 'are they now too close to Government? If they're not going to challenge them, is there any real point?' (ibid). This suggests that whilst UK-wide bridging ties exist that provide women's movement leaders with access to linking structures, their agency is restricted and so strategic engagement in this context is not producing real impact. Comments point to cynicism about the value of linking ties to Westminster, 'I suppose because we've had no input into Westminster, we're not really losing out on anything' (ibid). Emma pointed to the markedly better relationships at the European level, 'the European Peace Liaison Office do a big review of 10 countries with 1325...And they always include the UK, because the UK is great at delivering their National Action Plan across the world...they always include us in a box right beside it, saying 'and 1325 doesn't apply to Northern Ireland'. They're always in touch...and always inviting me over' (ibid). This is further evidence of the 'mixed methodology' deployed by movement leaders to advance their agenda; in this instance, seeking bridging ties at the European level to offset the impediments to progress at the UK level.

The women's movement has therefore engaged extensively with 1325, seeking to mainstream calls for implementation across the range of lobbying work and raising awareness of the Resolution and its implications for women from the grassroots through to Northern Irish, Irish and UK parliamentary levels. As with CEDAW, this international mechanism provides external legitimacy to the women's movement's arguments, which can be mobilised to employ the pincer movement and generate pressure from political sources beyond the UK: 'The wealth of experience in Northern Ireland may be marginalized within the UK but it is not overlooked by international agencies and key players from national conflicts elsewhere. In one week alone in 2009 there were nine visiting programmes to Northern Ireland led by the UN, EU and other agencies' (Hinds, 2010b). However, evidence provided here has shown that whilst linking ties to the Northern Ireland Assembly have developed as a result of this strategy, the potential for policy change ultimately lies with the UK government. There is little evidence to indicate that the women's movement has managed to establish effective linking ties to UK policy-makers in order to make this case.

Moreover, interview evidence suggests that NIWEP leadership over 1325 policy is being increasingly contested, as more organisations engage with 1325 and incorporate it into their work. Kate McCullough linked the NI women's movement's engagement with 1325 to her experience at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2002:



A civil servant in DFID [mentioned] 1325...I remember lifting up my head and going...that would probably be something to do with women in Northern Ireland?' Silence...at that time Tom Wolf was the leader in the mission, and I remember going to him...and he took me and Ann Marie into a room and he said: you're absolutely right, we should have put 1325 into the Agreement. Now he said that to us and we thought yes, here we go! (Interview: 10 December 2013)

However, Kate noted that in response to funding opportunities, other organisations have assumed leadership roles with reference to 1325, 'Government are actually using [TWN] as the example for implementation around 1325 because...Europe gives them money' (Interview: 10 December 2013). Emma Patterson-Bennett alluded to existing tensions about this apparent contestation to leadership, whilst highlighting larger benefits for the women's movement:

1325 has become quite sexy recently and there are academics working on it and there are a lot of other groups getting to grips with it...like WRDA, CFNI. TWN are also doing a big project...some other people in NIWEP...would say why are they doing that, we've always done that work...[but] it is for everyone and it's great that they feel empowered. No one can take away from us that instinctively we were the people who have been lobbying on this for 15 years...And I do suppose that when it comes to expertise people do come to NIWEP; even the people who are running the WRDA/CFNI event; they have a High Level Stakeholder Group and Irene sits on that. So while it may not be NIWEP's work, they still feed from NIWEP (Interview: 10 December 2013).

Evidence therefore shows that there are women's movement leaders for whom encroachments by other organisations into work that has traditionally been led by a single organisation represents a threat. This is due, at least in part, to the constraining external environment, as Hoewer suggests: 'Feminist interventions...have opened opportunities for UNSCR 1325...but are at the same time determined by the limited space that formal power structures allow. The struggle for a place within limited spaces can have a dividing function, evident in political decision-making and funding structures' (2013: 463). A sense of territoriality is perhaps to be expected when resources and opportunities for influence and interface with government are few. One can therefore argue that rather than being of inherent value, linking capital can serve to weaken bridging ties in the movement, particularly when it is founded upon or closely tied to financial resources or limited opportunities for consultation and influence. This may be compounded by government resistance to engagement with bottom-up agendas led by the women's movement; for instance, Ann Marie Gray and Liz Law note that the NIWEP-led 1325 Inquiry, 'called witnesses from political parties, from equality and human rights bodies, from relevant public bodies and from civil society in general including the trades unions. Disappointingly, although invited... [OFMDFM] responsible for the Gender Equality Strategy did not give evidence' (Law and Gray, 2014).

However, more widespread engagement by the women's movement with 1325 points to consensus around a strategy of using international mechanisms for domestic influence and change. As Catherine O'Rourke observed, activists on the ground in Northern Ireland felt that, 'this campaign, in and of itself, had some value irrespective of what the outcome would be. The actual campaign was giving rise to new alliances, organisations that had not previously

worked together were able to find a common agenda under 1325...so 1325 offered the potential to make some links between issues that tended to be viewed discretely' (O'Rourke, 2013). Whilst policy change has yet to come, 1325 has widespread currency in the women's movement and within the political establishment in Northern Ireland.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to mobilise evidence to answer the following questions: having established certain structures and practices to seek influence and input, has the women's movement been able to establish linking ties? What does the movement feel it has achieved with this new strategy? The abolition of the WNC weakened a collective UK women's movement voice, and removed any dedicated resourcing for regular and structured consultation of the NI women's movement by the UK government. The result has been a pattern of erratic interaction underpinned by an inconsistent and at times ill-informed commitment by the UK government to consult and engage with the women's movement. Meanwhile, the structures to pursue their goals through European engagement largely rely on a UK-wide mechanism that is under-resourced and therefore little utilised by the women's movement as a whole; such that the role of leadership agency by NIWEP does not play an activating role in transforming communally-held social capital in the Northern Ireland movement into linking ties with the British government and at the European level. The obstacles to securing European PEACE money and the bureaucratic burden that such funds bring has meant that potential linking ties through this mechanism have not emerged.

It is through the UN gender equality agenda that the women's movement has directed its efforts at establishing linking ties, both to the UN itself and to UK and Irish political institutions. Evidence has shown the movement's success at creating linking ties with the CEDAW Committee through strong leadership agency from NIWEP, and in so doing, acquiring international legitimacy for core policy aims. Extensive engagement with CEDAW and 1325 shows the movement's ability to generate dialogue with Northern Ireland policy-makers and establish avenues for ongoing consultation. However, evidence has problematised the success of these strategies for enabling progress on desired outcomes, showing that members of the women's movement are clear that real change requires political will from both the Northern Ireland Assembly *and* the UK government. In the absence of a concerted political commitment to resourcing participation across the devolved nations, the influence of the women's movement will remain constrained by the terms set by policy-makers.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **1. Restating the research questions**

This chapter will summarise the arguments, theoretical literatures and methodologies made and drawn upon in this thesis, to make the case for the value of a feminist social capital approach to the analysis of women's movement efforts to influence and gender policy-making, and for considering the interplay of leadership agency as a means to uncover transitional and transformational moments. Feminist scholars of Northern Ireland have shown the absence of women from a literature about the conflict and post-conflict transition, which centre upon ethnonationalism and an 'elite accommodation' (Byrne, 2009: 213) strategy. This thesis has built upon this work through a central hypothesis: following the transformative efforts of the Women's Coalition, the contemporary women's movement (via the agency of key leaders) has undertaken a strategic re-direction to develop linking ties in order to effect greater gender equality in Northern Ireland through policy influence, based upon the development of strong bridging social capital founded upon cross-movement coalitions. This re-direction has taken place in the context of a government narrative of gender neutrality and understanding of equality that is primarily framed in sectarian terms.

To do so, the thesis has endeavoured to answer the following research questions: Has the women's movement, having formed bridging links, converted these ties into political engagement as a collective movement by establishing linking ties with policy-makers; and if so, how has it responded to the Government's agenda of fostering social capital and has it succeeded in encouraging the Government to broaden this agenda to include gender equality? Has the women's movement established linking ties with supranational political institutions and international forums, and if so, how and why does it aim to utilise this linking social capital to increase linking ties at home? If these linking ties do exist, how and why do they help build bridging ties amongst women, by contributing to the development of shared goals? The role of strategically-placed leaders and their agency as 'activators' of social capital has been analysed throughout the investigation of these research questions.

#### **2. The research gap and answering the research questions**

[M]ost literature on social movement outcomes has focused on legislation or some other aspect of policy change...Much less attention is paid to the efficacy of movements in gaining acceptance or access' (Cowell-Meyers, 2014: 65).

Chapter 2 quoted social movement scholars who advocate for the need to 'bring the state back in' to the study of civic life and to account for the role of institutionalisation, in recognition of the dynamic and interactive relationship between political institutions and the women's movement (Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005; Andrew, 2010 and Chappell, 2000). A central aim of this study has been to analyse how the Northern Ireland women's movement works to advance feminist aims through collective efforts to engage with the Government in order to influence policy-making. In this sense, the theoretical frame is well-suited to the study; social capital can illuminate the democratic function of the women's movement.

Moreover, social capital is embedded in Northern Ireland government rhetoric and frames interaction between the Government and civil society organisations through the good relations agenda. However, despite both the dominance of the social capital narrative in Northern Ireland and existing literature analysing the development of the women's movement and Women's Coalition, there is a gap in understanding about the implications of an ethnonationally-driven social capital agenda for the women's movement and how the movement works to advance its goals in the context of this agenda.

Chapter 2 outlined the gaps in theory which underpin this core research problematic. Feminist scholars have critiqued traditional social capital approaches for rendering women's political citizenship invisible, arguing that a social capital analysis can reveal something significant about women's citizenship and democratic engagement if informed by a feminist approach which does not presume an assumed male citizen and considers possible qualitative differences in women-centred networks. This has particular value for a study of the Northern Ireland women's movement; providing a theoretical model for highlighting the development of cross-community bridging ties during the Troubles which created a foundation for the Women's Coalition, and a strategic change to seeking linking mechanisms with policy-makers and political institutions. By analysing the development of the women's movement as the move from bonding to bridging ties, it enabled a new understanding of the Women's Coalition as the formal political expression of bridging ties at the political level. The failure to sustain these ties created a need for strategic renewal, and a social capital analysis was used to argue that the movement turned to the development of linking ties as a means of maintaining policy influence.

However, Chapter 2 also made the case for a social capital analysis which takes leadership agency into account; understanding the 'activating' role of feminist leadership in the Northern Ireland women's movement in determining its strategic direction in order to shed light on transitional moments and tactical changes. The role of leaders in activating collectively-held social capital has been noted by some social capital theorists; this thesis has looked in detail at the benefits and drawbacks of such a strategy within a social movement. A focus on leaders allowed for a detailed analysis of strategic change; a movement-wide phenomenon but one which is driven by key leaders who can convert social capital into strategic action for social change and mobilise networks. As noted in Chapter 2, social capital can be made more productive by enhancing leadership agency, and the discussion of empirical findings below will explore what has been argued in this regard. The role of feminist leaders in generating and spending social capital has been under-theorised, and the methodology of this study therefore focused on producing information to illuminate this.

Having set out a comprehensive picture both of the development of the women's movement during the Troubles and the Women's Coalition, I began my analysis with an exploration of the post-NIWC transition in order to understand how the movement re-strategised following the failure of its attempt to recreate its bridging ties at the Assembly level, and therefore seeking to establish a foundation for exploring the development of linking ties. Scholars have evaluated the reasons for the Coalition's electoral failure and charted its dissolution, but there is little analysis of the women's movement's reaction and re-positioning. By introducing a social capital analysis to the consideration of the Women's Coalition, fresh light was cast on its successes and electoral failure, and it enabled an analysis which gave agency to the women's movement and its leaders in their response to this failure. That is, I used documentary and interview evidence, informed by a feminist social capital analysis, to

frame the movement's post-NIWC strategic change as an attempt to continue its access to and influence in the policy-making process. As such, interviews with former leading members of the party were conducted. The testimonies showed the process amongst leaders of establishing bridging and linking mechanisms, alongside an underlying practice of narrative creation to overcome disappointment about electoral failure and to spur collective action and strategic re-direction, to allow collectively-held social capital to be marshalled by leaders towards a strategy of developing linking ties to policy-makers and political institutions.

Participant observation, interviews and documentary evidence were used to develop a more comprehensive picture of how the post-NIWC women's movement has sought influence over policy-making to gender democracy in Northern Ireland. A defining feature of the movement's re-positioning has been the dual approach of a flexible and highly-networked structure, alongside the positioning of leaders in strategically significant roles to enable them to exercise agency and direct collectively-held social capital resources; both within the movement itself and in interface positions with the Northern Ireland government. This structure, founded upon flexibility and leadership agency, works alongside (and facilitates) efforts by the women's movement to establish linking ties to policy-makers. This is often achieved through mechanisms put in place in the context of a post-Peace Agreement equality agenda, which brought in a legislative framework, an equality and social capital narrative and culture of consultation. Such mechanisms have enabled the movement to position leaders in these strategic roles and advance its agenda within an institutionalised arena.

However, the existence of linking mechanisms does not guarantee meaningful linking ties to enable the women's movement to influence desired policy outcomes at the national level. Through interviews with movement leaders and documentary evidence, Chapter 5 outlined some of the inherent weaknesses in relying upon a flexible and leader-dependent structure, particularly in the face of a strong government narrative of good relations and gender neutrality in policy-making. This narrative has meant that the movement is constrained by the terms of linking structures even before it enters engagement with government, undermining the ability of leaders to exercise effective agency and broaden the terms of the debate. As Deiana argues: 'It seems in fact that 15 years after the signing of the Agreement, issues of women's citizenship are still inevitably relegated in favour of ethnonational interests in institutionalised politics' (2013: 205). That is, the dominance of ethnonationally-driven politics generally, and in relation to the Government's social capital agenda more specifically, constrains the women's movement's ability to establish effective linking ties which see reciprocal gains for both women's movement and institutional actors. This raises some larger theoretical considerations for social capital and social movement studies, which will be explored in the following section.

As such, alternative pathways are sought which have the potential to facilitate more meaningful links at the domestic level. To answer the research questions: how has the women's movement established linking ties with supranational political institutions and international forums, and if so, how and why does it aim to utilise this linking social capital to increase linking ties at home; Chapter 6 explored the levels beyond the Northern Ireland government with which the movement engages, by interviewing movement leaders, analysing documents and through participant observation (as described in Chapter 1). Engagement beyond the national (Northern Ireland) level has been a long-standing, supportive and creative arena for the development of the Northern Ireland women's movement's bridging ties.

It has also facilitated the practice of a 'politics of embarrassment' to induce action on the part of the Northern Ireland government. Sustained and collective participation in UK-wide structures like the WNC and international mechanisms like CEDAW provided and continue to provide an important source of legitimacy for movement goals and external pressure. The centrality of leadership agency to the flexible and networked structure of the women's movement becomes clear when engagement beyond Northern Ireland is analysed; a pattern of few resources and constrained leadership agency characterises engagement with Westminster and Europe, with strategically positioned leaders unable to compensate for bridging and linking mechanisms at these levels which are either under-resourced or inadequate in their generation of gains for the women's movement.

Agency is effective at the UN level, however, with leader engagement endorsed and bolstered by wider women's movement efforts to use the norms of the global gender agenda to strengthen linking ties at home and develop arguments for policy change to effect greater gender equality in Northern Ireland. As argued in Chapter 6, tangible outcomes on policy change are limited. However, as Cowell-Meyers asserts in the quote at the beginning of this section, less attention has been paid to the efficacy of movements in gaining access and acceptance, 'goals that are not well understood in much of the scholarship on social movements' (2014: 62). The ability of the women's movement to create and advance a dialogue with the Northern Ireland government around international commitments, and see the Government adapt its consultative behaviours (for instance, the APG on UNSCR 1325 or the role of women's movement leaders in training departmental staff on international gender equality commitments), shows a level of strategic success in acquiring access to policy-makers and acceptance on core norms of the gender equality agenda.

### **3. Implications for policy and theoretical debates**

This thesis makes a contribution to the public debate about the participation of the women's movement in political life and policy-making in Northern Ireland, a debate which has been heavily framed in terms which overlook both the role of women's organisations and the patterns of gender inequality in society in Northern Ireland. This case has been made by engaging with a social capital policy debate current in Northern Ireland and using a social capital analysis that draws upon existing scholarship, to expand this debate and show that the women's movement actively, creatively and collectively works to represent the views and interests of women in the policy-making process.

The analytical focus throughout this study has been on the way that the women's movement seeks to influence policy-making; not on a tangible impact on policies or numerical representation in politics, but how it builds links horizontally and vertically to try and see a gendered approach mainstreamed in policy-making. By doing so, it has made a renewed case for analysing social movements through a social capital lens; but more than that, it has uncovered theoretical gaps in social capital theory which when addressed, say something significant about bridging and linking social capital. As stated above, feminist scholars have critiqued social capital for its omissions and assumptions about citizenship and politics. This study developed such critiques by using a feminist ethnographical approach to explore the women's movement in terms of social capital.

By doing so, this thesis has problematised linking social capital, particularly by analysing the implications for the women's movement. A strategy focused on establishing linking ties

requires a degree of engagement with the Government agenda; whether it is seeking consultative status, financial support or recognition of movement expertise or its representative function. The benefits of linking social capital were outlined in Chapter 2; the community can leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions and link vertically to institutions in a mutually beneficial exchange. For the women's movement, however, its ability to reap such benefits is constrained by the Northern Ireland government's adherence to an understanding of social capital that is influenced by traditional, gender-blind approaches to social capital theory. This is based on community as primarily defined in ethnonational, gender-neutral terms; society will be improved by encouraging bridging social capital between communities and enabling linking ties to support and embed its development.

Civil society actors operating according to a different understanding of community are necessarily excluded from this process. By focusing on community relations (an essentially 'ungendered' doctrine) - as the amelioration of ethnonational relations - the Government does not acknowledge women's social capital because it does not consider it to be relevant to its larger agenda, or at best, an unforeseen consequence that is neither sought nor encouraged for its inherent value or its social, political and economic contribution. By engaging with this agenda in order to find a route to establishing linking ties, the women's movement is therefore drawn in to delivering an agenda in which its core aims are seen as peripheral.

However, despite the dominance of community relations as the Northern Ireland government's social capital agenda, the women's movement operates in an environment in which gender equality is nevertheless grounded in legislation and the women's movement can seek opportunities for input and influence. This study has shown the ways in which linking ties have been established – notably, by creating bridging ties through strong policy-oriented structures, the movement legitimised itself in the eyes of the Government and positioned itself as a reasonable, representative stakeholder. Linking ties can therefore be creatively sought and established through agency on the part of social movements, by participating in a process undertaken by the Government of sourcing and establishing legitimacy through consulting organised interests.

Social capital has been critiqued for seeing the accrual of linking ties as an inherently worthwhile, even unproblematic process. Whilst this thesis has provided a case study for how a social movement is able to create or maximise the opportunities for influencing policy-making to further its aims, it has also alluded to fundamental drawbacks to engagement of this kind which should be emphasised for wider consideration in debates about social capital and social movements. Linking ties between social movements and government serve an important democratic function; organised interests are represented and external expert knowledge is brought into policy-making, enriching the democratic process. However, the terms upon which these ties are established and operate can prove to be fundamentally imbalanced. This thesis has shown that in its relationship to both the Northern Ireland and UK governments, the women's movement does not experience the kind of benefits which would characterise meaningful linking ties by leveraging resources and information.

When the UK government sought to rationalise the abolition of the Women's National Commission, it justified the decision through a purported wish to connect politicians more directly with women and women's movements across the UK; that is, one may argue, the State sought to strengthen linking social capital by removing an 'arms' length' body and establishing closer, more representative ties. In reality, a rhetoric of more direct and effective linking social capital served to greatly weaken bridging ties between the women's movements of the four

nations of the UK, removing dedicated resources for collective action and undermining linking ties between the Northern Ireland movement and Westminster. This works to the detriment of the Northern Ireland women's movement, as weakened bridging ties undermine a shared platform from which to propel its agenda forward. For the Government, however, the resulting fragmentation creates an 'open market', ensuring greater empowerment in choosing who to engage with and in managing access, consultation and resources to a greater extent. Ultimately, therefore, linking ties resemble less a process of reciprocity, and more a forum for the exercise of government power and control.

This can coalesce with the Government's push for rationalisation of the organised interests with which it engages. Linking ties which are weighted in government's favour can also allow it to shape civil society actors and organised interests into delivery agents of its agenda. As argued in Chapter 5, policy-makers in Northern Ireland approach the women's movement in terms of added value for the Government's agenda; does it deliver, does it represent value for money and so on. The interplay of financial resources with this process can result in organisational transformation, with government seeking mergers and the establishment of consortia to draw in and contain movement actors into structures designed by government, according to its agenda, and which are granted representative status from above. This is in contrast to the women's movement-led approach, in which movement-originating bridging structures build representative legitimacy through voluntary collaboration and in so doing, establish the foundation for linking ties. It cannot therefore be said that reciprocal gains on both sides are inherent to linking social capital.

This is not to say that a strategy of seeking and establishing linking ties is ill-advised or necessarily counter-productive to achieving social movement goals. Scholars of social movements like Andrew (2010) have argued that rather than seeing institutional engagement as cooption and marginalisation, it can entail complex processes of partial adoption and reconfiguration of movement goals by institutions; this can represent very real successes for social movements in the advancement of their agendas. Indeed, institutionalisation has, to a degree, long been a feature of the women's movement (and *movements*, as Sawyer (2010) has argued) and was integral to what the Women's Coalition wanted to achieve. The failure to institutionalise the women's movement qua party in the Northern Ireland Assembly therefore led to the sought-for institutionalisation of women's movement aims through linking ties; a strategic adjustment but consistent with the larger goal of advancing gender equality in Northern Ireland via institutional engagement. This thesis has shown that this can have some success on an issue-by-issue basis; when institutional and movement interests align, seen in some aspects of the welfare reform debate in Northern Ireland, linking ties are shown to be productive and mutually beneficial. However, the fundamental imbalances which characterise the linking ties between the women's movement and Northern Ireland government undermine the benefits of partial institutionalisation and linking ties, and should be considered in the study of social capital and particularly ties between institutions and civil society.

This study has also asserted the importance of considering the role of leadership agency within a social capital analysis. Some scholars have explored its interplay with social movement agency more widely, and considered the role it plays in engendering and extending social capital; arguing that both agency and social capital must be available in a community to ensure meaningful change. This view argues that individuals are active beings able to provoke social change, contrary to neoclassical theory that eliminates the individual altogether; thereby seeking to, 'reinstate the "social" in social capital' (Christoforou, 2011). This thesis builds on



this principle, by highlighting and analysing the catalytic role of leaders in the Northern Ireland women's movement. A leadership agency analysis has explained moments of key success from the Women's Coalition onwards; the ability of key individuals to mobilise participants and capitalise upon opportunities to engage with institutional actors.

Leadership agency has been shown to be crucial to maintaining such a highly-networked movement, and the ability of movement leaders to fulfil both expert and representational functions in multiple forums across civil society and institutional levels facilitates both bridging and linking ties. The flexibility inherent in this system enables the women's movement to manage necessary transitional moments and strategic change, notably the strategic shift following the electoral failure of the Women's Coalition. In this case, movement leaders were able to draw upon strong bridging ties and activate collectively-held social capital to enable mutually beneficial collective action. The agency of leaders can therefore be an important analytical consideration in furthering an understanding about bridging and linking social capital in the study of social movements. Empowering leaders to galvanise collectively-held social capital can see significant benefits in advancing a movement's shared goals and agenda, particularly when opportunities exist for institutional engagement or consultation with organised interests.

However, risks are incurred when leadership agency becomes concentrated in a cadre of key individuals, which can engender personality conflicts, succession issues and over-dependence, leaving the movement exposed if the equilibrium between individual leaders or institutional actors changes. This thesis has been particularly interested in how a movement advances feminist aims, and thus the role of *feminist* leadership agency in developing social capital – in which collective empowerment and social change/justice goals are central – should be reflected upon. Chapter 2 outlined arguments from scholars of women's movements that institutional engagement can reduce the emphasis on a more radical agenda.

It may be hypothesised that the reliance on a number of feminist leaders, acting as interlocutors for the movement in its institutional engagement with regard to policy influence to advance feminist goals, may concentrate the agenda and its fortunes in a few hands, opening the movement up to the risks (rather than benefits) of institutionalisation and imbalanced linking ties, and thereby diminish clear-sighted pursuit of movement aims. However, for the Northern Ireland movement, the influence of groups like the Belfast Feminist Network which operate largely outside of bridging and linking structures and funding constraints, can prove complementary to influencing policy-making. Both approaches are beneficial to the larger aims; the leader-driven strategy which seeks linking ties can be positioned strategically vis-à-vis institutions to activate collectively-held social capital, whilst the latter approach drives a grassroots, issue-oriented feminism outside formal structures which can build a broader base of support across the society more widely.

#### **4. Suggestions for further research**

In outlining the contributions made above, this thesis signposts a number of directions for further research, based not least in the empirical limitations of the study. The research focus has been on Northern Ireland and on the women's movement. The other women's movements of the UK, and the UK-wide women's movement, have been considered albeit in a peripheral manner, however it would certainly be possible to apply a similar approach to these regions. Indeed, this could produce some interesting conclusions about the development and current

position of these movements both separately and collectively, for which similar political circumstances obtain in key aspects, including a roll back in welfare provision affecting women and the voluntary sector and the dismantling of certain core structures of the gender equality architecture. Whilst the social capital agenda of the Northern Ireland government has developed within a unique cultural and political climate, social capital as a political philosophy across the UK (whether as the Third Way, Big Society or another iteration) continues to hold sway and shape the Government's relationship to civil society. The extent to which these agendas encompass a gender awareness and the interplay with other political trends would be a matter for further research.

Lastly, the importance of leadership agency has been a central argument of this thesis. It also had methodological foundation, as the reality of a movement in a geographically and numerically small country is that a core group of leaders came to the fore in a more significant manner than might be seen elsewhere. This meant that it was possible to identify leadership agency in activating collectively-held social capital. It would be interesting to see whether similar conclusions could be drawn about women's movements of comparable size and in countries of similar populations to Northern Ireland. Would it be possible to find evidence of strong bridging and linking ties with a core leadership empowered to act on the movement's behalf, or do the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland - as a post-conflict, ethnonationally-demarcated state in which women's collective activism was born of necessity and developed in creative and flexible ways - render the women's movement here a unique case study? It would seem likely that the development of women's movements in other post-conflict countries could be illuminated further through a social capital analysis which takes leadership agency into account, to uncover transitional moments and strategic changes in the face of external pressures or opportunities (in the course of peace processes, for instance).

More specifically in relation to the Northern Ireland women's movement, it should be noted that issues raised in the thesis regarding the potential risks of reliance on certain individual leaders in nodal positions in the network structure could be of imminent relevance. A number of key leaders interviewed for this study, including two leaders from one centrally-networked organisation, have this year retired or moved to organisations not featured in Figure 2. For a movement which relies often on relationships between movement leaders and between leaders and institutional actors for effective engagement, and on the expert knowledge of women built during long-term participation in the women's movement, the loss or transitional status of key leaders may have implications for bridging and linking ties. Further study could chart how the movement re-configures to absorb leadership changes, and explore whether newer forms of feminist activism (including the anecdotal increase in young women's engagement) are having an impact on bridging and linking social capital and the movement's subsequent ability to influence policy-making in a positive manner for gender equality in Northern Ireland.

## Bibliography

- Acheson, N., Williamson, A., Cairns, E., and Stringer, M. (2006). "Voluntary Action and Community Relations in Northern Ireland", *Community Relations Council*, Autumn. 1-147
- Acheson, N., and Milofsky, C. (2008). "Peace Building and Participation in Northern Ireland: Local Social Movements and the Policy Process since the "Good Friday" Agreement", *Ethnopolitics* 7:1, 63-80
- Acker, J., Barry, K., and Esseveld, J. (1991). "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research", in Fonow, M., and Cook, J. (eds.), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 133-153
- Ackerly, B., and True, J. (2008). "Reflexivity in Practice: Power and Ethics in Feminist Research on International Relations", *International Studies Review* 10:4. 693–707
- Adkins, L. (2005). "Social Capital: The anatomy of a troubled concept", *Feminist Theory* 6:2, 195 – 211
- Adler, P., and Kwon, S-W. (2002). "Social Capital: Prospects for a new concept", *The Academy of Management Review* 27: 1, 17-40
- Afshar, H., and Eade, D. (eds.) (2004). *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives*. Oxfam GB
- Aldridge, S., Halpern, D., and Fitzpatrick, S. (2002). "Social Capital: A Discussion Paper", *Performance and Innovation Unit*. London: The Cabinet Office
- Andrew, M., (2008). *Social Movements and the Limits of Strategy: How Australian Feminists Formed Positions on Work and Care* (Doctoral Thesis, The Australian National University). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/49281>
- Andrew, M., (2010). "Women's Movement Institutionalisation: The Need for New Approaches", *Politics and Gender* 6:4, 609-616
- Area Development Management / Combat Poverty Agency (ADM/CPA). (2003). *Women and Peace-building: identifying the research gaps*. Monaghan: ADM/CPA
- Ashe, F. (2006). "The Virgin Mary Connection: Reflecting on Feminism and Northern Irish Politics", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9:4, 573-588
- Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security (APG-WPS) (2010). *Northern Ireland 1325 Inquiry: Draft Concept Note*
- Aziz, A., Shams, M., and Khan, K. (2011). "Participatory action research as the approach for women's empowerment", *Action Research* 9:3, 303-323

Bagguley, P. (2002). "Contemporary British Feminism: a social movement in abeyance?", *Social Movement Studies* 1:2, 169-185

Bayat, A. (2005). *Defining Social Capital: A brief overview of the key aspects and debates*, Project: Policy Management, Governance and Poverty Alleviation in the Western Cape. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/1371355/Discussion\\_Paper\\_Defining\\_Social\\_Capital\\_A\\_brief\\_overview\\_of\\_the\\_key\\_aspects\\_and\\_debates](http://www.academia.edu/1371355/Discussion_Paper_Defining_Social_Capital_A_brief_overview_of_the_key_aspects_and_debates)

Belfast Feminist Network. *Vision and Aims* Retrieved 14 October 2014 from, <http://belfastfeministnetwork.wordpress.com/vision-and-aims/>

Bergman, M., & Coxon, A. (2005). "The quality in qualitative methods". *Forum Qualitative Social Research* 6:2. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/457>

Berkovitch, N., and Moghadam, V. (1999). "Middle East Politics and Women's Collective Action: Challenging the Status Quo", *Social Politics* 6:3, 273-291

Bingham, R. (2008). "Is it Women Leaders or Women Feminist Leaders? *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 32:4, 488-490

Birrell, D., and Williamson, A. (2001). "The Voluntary–Community Sector and Political Development in Northern Ireland, Since 1972", *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 12:3, 205-220

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The forms of capital*, in: Richardson, J. (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 241–258

Breitbart, M. (2003). "Participatory research", in Clifford, N., and Valentine, G. (eds.), *Key methods in Geography*. Sage: London, 161 – 178

Breitenbach, E., and Galligan, Y. (2004). *Gender Equality Indicators for Northern Ireland: A Discussion Document*, Belfast: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Retrieved from <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/genderequalityindicators.pdf>

Brown, A., Donaghy, T., Mackay, F., and Meehan, E. (2002). "Women and Constitutional Change in Scotland and Northern Ireland", *Parliamentary Affairs* 55:1, 71-84

Bryson, V. (2012). "Women and Feminisation", in Heppell, T., and Seawright, D. (eds.), *Cameron and the Conservatives: The Transition to Coalition Government*. Palgrave Macmillan, 149-166

Buchanan, R., McDade, D., and Jamison, J. (2007). *Indicators of Equality and Diversity in Northern Ireland: Report of Consultation*. Belfast: OFMDFM

- Burgess, J. (2006). "Participatory action research: First-person perspectives of a graduate student", *Action Research* 4:4, 419-437
- Byrne, B. (1996). "Towards a Gendered Understanding of Conflict", *IDS Bulletin* 27:3, 31-40
- Byrne, S. (2009). "Beyond the Ethnonational Divide: Identity Politics and Women in Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine" (Doctoral Thesis, Queen's University). Retrieved from <http://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/1671>
- Byrne McCullough, E. (2004). "Women in Politics in Northern Ireland: The experience of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition". Retrieved from [http://equal.uji.es/clausura/ponencia\\_byrneEN.pdf](http://equal.uji.es/clausura/ponencia_byrneEN.pdf)
- Cahill, C. (2007a). "Including excluded perspectives in participatory action research", *Design Studies* 28:3, 325 – 340
- Cahill, C. (2007b). "The Personal is Political: Developing new subjectivities through participatory action research", *Gender, Place and Culture* 14:3, 267-292
- Cairns, E., Van Til, J., and Williamson, A. (2003). *Social Capital, Collectivism-Individualism and Community Background in Northern Ireland: A Report to The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the Head of the Voluntary and Community Unit of the Department for Social Development*. Belfast: OFMDFM
- Campbell, A., Hughes, J., Hewstone, M., and Cairns, E. (2008). "Social Capital as a Mechanism for Building a Sustainable Society in Northern Ireland", *Community Development Journal* 45:1, 22-38
- Campbell, B. (2014, 16 June). " 'None of us have the right to be who we were': a tribute to a peacebuilder", *Open Democracy* [Online]. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/beatrix-campbell/%27none-of-us-have-right-to-be-who-we-were%27-tribute-to-peacebuilder>
- Carroll, S., and Zerilli, L. (1993). "Feminist Challenges to Political Science", in Finifter, A., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*. The American Political Science Association: Washington DC, 55-76
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Chappell, L. (2000). "Interacting with the state - Feminist strategies and political opportunities", *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 2:2, 244-275
- Childs, S. (2008). *Women and British Party Politics: Descriptive, Substantive and Symbolic Representation*, Oxon: Routledge

Chin, J. (2004). "2003 Division 35 Presidential Address: Feminist Leadership: Feminist Visions And Diverse Voices", *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 28:1, 1-8

Christoforou, A. (2011). "Social Capital: A Manifestation of Neoclassical Prominence or a Path to a More Pluralistic Economics?", *Journal of Economic Issues* 45:3, 685-701

Clarke, L. (2014, 17 February). 'Sinn Fein 'reneged on welfare pledge' - Wilson anger at £5m monthly cost of impasse', *Belfast Telegraph*

Cockburn, C. (1998). *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National identities in Conflict*. London: Zed Books

Cockburn, C., and Zarkov, D. (2002). "Introduction", in Cockburn, C., and Zarkov, D., (eds), *The Post War Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1- 21

Coleman, J. (1988). "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital", *The American Journal of Sociology* 94:1, S95-S120

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2010). *Report on its Inquiry into Consideration of European Issues*. Northern Ireland Assembly: Report NIA 33/09/10R. Retrieved from [http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/2007mandate/reports/2009/Report\\_33\\_09\\_10R.htm](http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/2007mandate/reports/2009/Report_33_09_10R.htm)

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2012). *PEACE IV Funding: Community Relations Council Briefing*. Retrieved from <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Committee-Minutes-of-Evidence/Session-2012-2013/November-2012/Peace-IV-Funding-Community-Relations-Council-Briefing/>

Commonwealth Secretariat. (2010). *Bridgetown Communiqué: Gender Issues in Economic Crisis, Recovery and Beyond: Women as Agents of Transformation*. Ninth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting

Cornwall, A., and Jewkes, R. (1995). "What is participatory research?" *Social Science & Medicine* 41:12, 1667-1676

Council Of Europe. (2001). *Participation of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts*. Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), seminar held in Strasbourg, 20-21 September. Retrieved from [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/conflict-prevention-peacebuilding/EG-SEM-PEACE\(2001\)9\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/conflict-prevention-peacebuilding/EG-SEM-PEACE(2001)9_en.pdf)

Cowell-Meyers, K. (2011). "A Collarette on a Donkey: The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the Limitations of Contagion Theory", *Political Studies* 59:2, 411-431

- Cowell-Meyers, K. (2014). "The Social Movement as Political Party: The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the Campaign for Inclusion", *American Political Science Association* 12:1, 61-80
- Dahlerup, D., and Freidenvall, L. (2005). "Quotas as a "Fast Track" to Equal Political Representation for Women: Why Scandinavia is No Longer the Model", *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7:1, 26-48
- Dale, A., and Newman, L. (2008). "Social capital: a necessary and sufficient condition for sustainable community development?", *Community Development Journal* 45:1, 5-21
- Deiana, M-A. (2013). "Women's Citizenship in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement", *Irish Political Studies* 28:3, 399-412
- DemocraShe (2010). *Welcoming Political Development: Now Implement the Agreement's Commitments on Women's Representation*. Press Release, 2 July
- Department for Social Development (DSD). (2006). *Toolkit to Measure the Added Value of Community and Voluntary Based Activity*. Belfast: DSD
- Department for Social Development (DSD). (2012). *Welfare Reform Bill: Women's/Family Groups Briefing to the Committee for Social Development*. Belfast: DSD
- Department for Social Development (DSD). (2013a). *Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas: Survey of Women's Groups Analysis*. Belfast: DSD
- Department for Social Development (DSD). (2013b). AQW 19281/11-15 in *Assembly Questions and Answers*: February 2013
- Department for Social Development (DSD). (2013c). AQW 22782/11-15 in *Assembly Questions and Answers*: May 2013
- Department for Social Development (DSD) and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). (2012). *Joint Policy Statement: Programme for Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged Areas and Rural Areas*. Belfast: DSD&DARD
- Dietz, M. (2003). "Current Controversies in Feminist Theory". *Annual Review of Political Science* 6, 399-431
- Dobrowolsky, A. (2002). "Crossing Boundaries: Exploring and Mapping Women's Constitutional Interventions in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland", *Social Politics* 9:2, 293-340
- Dobrowolsky, A. (2003). "Shifting states: women's constitutional organising across time and space", in Banaszak, L. (ed.) *Women's Movements facing the reconfigured state*. Cambridge University Press, 114-140

- Donaghy, T. (2003). "Mainstreaming: Northern Ireland's Participative-Democratic Approach", *Centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics*, Occasional Paper 2, 1-14
- Donaghy, T. (2004). "The Impact of Devolution on Women's Political Representation Levels in Northern Ireland", *Politics* 24:1, 26-34
- Dunn, S. (ed.) (1995). *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*. London: Macmillan Press
- Edgerton, M. (1986). "Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescence: Women in Northern Ireland," in Ridd, R., and Callaway, H. (eds.), *Caught Up in Conflict: Women's Responses to Political Strife*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 61-79
- El-Bushra, J., and Piza-Lopez, E. (1994). "Gender, War and Food", in Macrae, J., and Zwi, A. (eds.), *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, London: Zed Books, 180-93
- El Jack, A. (2003). "Gender and Armed Conflict: An Overview Report", *BRIDGE: Institute of Development Studies*, August, 1-48
- England, K. (1994). "Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research", *The Professional Geographer* 46:1, 80-89
- Enloe, C. (1983). *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives*, London: Pandora Press
- Epstein, B. (2001). "What happened to the women's movement?" *Monthly Review* 53:1, 1-13
- Eto, M. (2008). "Women's Autonomous Organizations, Civil Society and Democracy: How Women's Agencies Link Their Demands to Politics, From a Comparative Perspective", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the APSA 2008 Annual Meeting, Hynes Convention Centre, Boston, Massachusetts. Retrieved from [http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/7/9/7/1/pages279717/p279717-1.php](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/7/9/7/1/pages279717/p279717-1.php)
- European Database. (date unknown). *Interview with Monica McWilliams*. Retrieved from <http://www.db-decision.de/Interviews/Uk/Mcwilliams.htm>
- European Women's Lobby (2010). *20 Years of EWL*. Retrieved 10 December 2013 from <http://www.womenlobby.org/about-us/History/?lang=en>
- European Women's Lobby (2012a). *Submission of the European Women's Lobby to Lord Morrow MLA on Proposed changes in the law to tackle human trafficking*
- European Women's Lobby. (2012b). *Brussels' Call: Together for a Europe free from Prostitution*. Brussels: EWL



- European Women's Lobby. (2014). *18 Myths on Prostitution*. Brussels: EWL
- Evans, K. (2011). " 'Big Society' in the UK: A Policy Review", *Children & Society* 25:2, 164-171
- Evason, E. (1991). *Against The Grain: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Attic Press
- Farrington, C. (2004). "Models of Civil Society and their Implications for the Northern Ireland Peace Process", *IBIS Working Papers in British-Irish Studies* 43, 1-23
- Fearon, K. (ed.) (1996). *Power, Politics, Positionings: Women in Northern Ireland*. Democratic Dialogue: Belfast. Retrieved from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/report4/report4.htm#contents>
- Fearon, K. (1999). *Women's Work: The Story of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press
- Fearon, K. (2000). "Whatever happened to the women? Gender and peace in Northern Ireland", in Cox, M., Guelke, A., and Stephens, F. (eds.), *A Farewell to Arms? From 'long war' to long peace in Northern Ireland*. Manchester University Press, 136-165
- Fearon, K., and McWilliams, M. (1998). "The Good Friday Agreement: A Triumph of Substance Over Style", *Fordham International Law Journal* 22:4, 1250-1272
- Galligan, Y. (2002). "The politics of women's representation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland", *Institute for British-Irish Studies Working Papers* 16, 1-9
- Galligan, Y. (2006). "Women in Northern Ireland's Politics" in Sawyer, M., Tremblay, M., and Trimble, L. (eds.), *Representing Women in Parliament: A Comparative Study*. Oxon: Routledge, 204-221
- Galligan, Y. (2010). "Thinking About Gender And Democracy", *Parliament of Australia, Papers on Parliament* 53. Retrieved from, [http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Senate/Research\\_and\\_Education/pops/pop53/5yvo nnEgalligan](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Research_and_Education/pops/pop53/5yvo nnEgalligan)
- Galligan, Y. (2013). "Gender and Politics in Northern Ireland: The Representation Gap Revisited", *Irish Political Studies* 28:3, 413-433
- Galligan, Y., Ward, E., and Wilford, R. (eds.) (1999). *Contesting Politics: Women in Ireland, North and South*. Colorado: Westview Press
- Gatenby, B., and Humphries, M. (2000). "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Methodological and Ethical Issues", *Women's Studies International Forum* 23:1, 89-105

- Gidengil, E., Goodyear-Grant, E., Nevitte, N., and Blais, A. (2006). "Gender, Knowledge, and Social Capital", in O'Neill, B., and Gidengil, E. (eds.), *Gender and Social Capital*. Oxon: Routledge, 241-272
- Gillies, V., and Alldred, P. (2002). "The Ethics of Intention: Research as a political tool", in Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J., and Miller, T. (eds.), *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications, 32-52
- Government Equalities Office (GEO). (2010). *Equality Impact Assessment: Spending Review 10/11: Review of NDPBs – decision to abolish the Women's National Commission and replace it with a new model for communicating with women in the UK (UK Women) delivered by Government Equalities Office*. London: GEO
- Gray, A., and Birrell, D. (2011). "Coalition Government in Northern Ireland: Social Policy and the Lowest Common Denominator Thesis", *Social Policy and Society* 11:1, 15-25
- Hain, P. (2005). Letter as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to Meg Munn MP, Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, 23 November
- Hale, P. (2008). *Engaging Contradictions: theory, politics and methods of activist scholarship*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Hammersley, M., and Atkinson, P. (1994). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge
- Hancock, L., Mooney, G., and Neal, S. (2012). "Crisis Social Policy and the Resilience of the Concept of Community", *Critical Social Policy* 32:3, 343-364
- Harrell, A. (2009). "Equal Participation but Separate Paths? Women's Social Capital and Turnout", *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy* 30:1, 1-22
- Heenan, D. (1997). "Getting to Go: Women and Community Relations in Northern Ireland", *Community Development Journal*, 32:1, 87-95
- Heyl, B. (2007). "Ethnographic Interviewing", in Atkinson, P., Delamont, S., Coffey, A., Lofland, J., and Lofland, L. (eds), *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage. 369-383
- Hillyard P., McWilliams, M., and Ward, M. (2006). *Northern Ireland Gender Audit*. Belfast: Economic and Social Research Council
- Hinds, B. (1999). "Women Working for Peace in Northern Ireland", in Galligan, Y., Ward, E., and Wilford, R. (eds.). *Contesting Politics: Women in Ireland, North and South*. Colorado: Westview Press, 109-129
- Hinds, B. (2008). "Political Culture in the Northern Ireland Assembly", *Speech at the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, Warwick University*. 15 February, 1-17

Hinds, B. (2010a). "Patterns of Conflict Resolution: How to Draw Lessons from Northern Ireland", *Speech at IBIS/Stratagem Conference*. 2 December 2010. Retrieved 25 August 2014 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wj-f6sccdsE>

Hinds, B. (2010b). *Extract from WNC Speech on 1325*, February

Hinds, B. (2011). *The Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge? A Comprehensive Analysis of the Impacts of the Financial Crisis*. Belfast: Women's Resource and Development Agency

Hinds, B., and Nolan-Haley, J. (2003). "Problem-Solving Negotiations: Northern Ireland's Experience with the Women's Coalition." *Journal of Dispute Resolution* 2, 387-402

Hoewer, M. (2013). "UN Resolution 1325 in Ireland: Limitations and Opportunities of the International Framework on Women, Peace and Security", *Irish Political Studies* 28:3, 450-468

Holt, M. (2004). "Palestinian women, violence, and the peace process", in Afshar, H., and Eade, D. (eds.). *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives*. Oxfam GB, 109-129

Hope, A. (2006). "Contesting Politics: Putting Gender on the Peace Agenda". Retrieved from [http://www.sare-emakunde.com/media/anual/archivosAsociados/Hope.A\\_06\\_engl.pdf](http://www.sare-emakunde.com/media/anual/archivosAsociados/Hope.A_06_engl.pdf)

Horgan, G., and Gray, A. (2012). "Devolution in Northern Ireland: A Lost Opportunity?", *Critical Social Policy* 32:3, 467-478

Horowitz, D. (2002). "Explaining the Northern Ireland Agreement: The Sources of an Unlikely Constitutional Consensus", *British Journal of Political Science* 32:2, 193-220

Hossain, M. (2012). "Security and the Pathways of Women's Empowerment: Findings from a Thematic Synthesis of the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research", *IDS Working Paper* 20: 406, 1-48

Hughes, J., and McCandless, F. (2006). 'A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland: Recommendations for action in Community Relations and Community Development' in Hughes, J., and McCandless, F. (eds.). *Sharing Over Separation*. Belfast: Community Relations Council, 159-180

Hyatt, S. (1992). "Accidental Activists: Women and Politics on a Council Estate," in *Crosscurrents: The Journal of Graduate Research in Anthropology*, Vol. V: Autumn, 93-102

Jasper, J. (2004). "A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social-Movement Choices", *Mobilisation: An International Journal* 9:1, 1-16

Kilmurray, A. (1987). "Women in the Community in Northern Ireland: Struggling for Their Half of the Sky", *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 76: 302, 177-184

Kilmurray, A. (2006). "Putting Social Capital into Practice", Speech at the ippr. Retrieved from <http://www.ippr.org.uk/uploadedFiles/ipprnorth/events/2006/Avila%20Kilmurray%20speech.doc>

Kilmurray, A., and McWilliams, M. (2011). "Struggling for Peace: How Women in Northern Ireland Challenged the Status Quo", *Solutions* 2:2, 1-7

Kim, S., and Kim, K. (2011). "Gender mainstreaming and the institutionalization of the women's movement in South Korea", *Women's Studies International Forum* 34:5, 390-400

Kirton, G., and Healy, G. (2012). "'Lift as you rise': Union women's leadership talk", *Human Relations* 65:8, 979-999

Knappe, H., and Lang, S. (2014). "Between whisper and voice: Online women's movement outreach in the UK and Germany", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21:4, 1-21

Korac, M. (2008). 'Gender, Conflict, and Social Capital: Bonding and bridging in war in the former Yugoslavia' in Cox, M. (ed.). *Social Capital and Peace-Building: Creating and Resolving Conflict with Trust and Social Networks*. London: Routledge, 107-121

Krishna, A. (2001). "Moving from the Stock of Social Capital to the Flow of Benefits: The Role of Agency", *World Development* 29:6, 925-943

Kumlin, S., and Rothstein, B. (2005). "Investing in Social Capital: The Impact of Welfare State Institutions", *Comparative Political Studies* 38: 4, 339-365

Langan, D., and Morton, M. (2009). "Reflecting on community/academic 'collaboration': The challenge of 'doing' feminist participatory action research", *Action Research* 7:2, 165-184

Law, E., and Gray, A. (2014, 26 June). "The politics of defining 'armed conflict' in Northern Ireland", *Open Democracy* [Online], Retrieved from <https://opendemocracy.net/5050/elizabeth-law-ann-marie-gray/politics-of-defining-armed-conflict-in-northern-ireland#.VEfJJbqVQjA.email>

Leonard, M. (2004). "Bonding and Bridging Social Capital: Reflections from Belfast", *Sociology* 38: 5, 927 – 944

Lewis, J. (1999). "Reviewing the Relationship Between the Voluntary Sector and the State in Britain in the 1990s", *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 10:3, 255-270

Lin, N. (1999). "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital", *Connections* 22: 1, 28-51

Lin, N. (2005). "Social Capital", in Beckert, J., and Zagiroski, M. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Economic Sociology*, London: Routledge

- Lin, N. (2006). "A Network Theory of Social Capital" in Castiglione, D., Van Deth, J., and Wolleb, G. (eds.), *A Handbook on Social Capital*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 50-69
- Ling, C., and Dale, A. (2013). "Agency and social capital: characteristics and dynamics", *Community Development Journal* 49:1, 1-17
- Lister, R. (1997). "Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis", *Feminist Review* 57: Autumn, 28-48
- Lister, R. (1998). "Citizen in Action: Citizenship and community development in a Northern Ireland context", *Community Development Journal* 33:3, 226-235
- Lister, R. (2011). "From the Intimate to the Global: Reflections on Gendered Citizenship", in Oleksy, E., Hearn, J., and Golanska, D. (eds.), *The Limits of Gendered Citizenship: Contexts and Complexities*. Oxon: Routledge, 27-41
- Little, A. (2002). "Feminism and the Politics of Difference in Northern Ireland", *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7:2, 163-177
- Longo, P. (2001). "Revisiting the Equality/Difference Debate: Redefining Citizenship for the New Millennium", *Citizenship Studies* 5:3, 269-283
- Lovenduski, J. (1998). "Gendering Research in Political Science", *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, 333-356
- Lowndes, V. (2000). "Women and Social Capital: A Comment on Hall's 'Social Capital in Britain'", *British Journal of Political Science* 30:3, 533-537
- Lowndes, V. (2004). "Getting on or Getting By? Women, Social Capital and Political Participation", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6:1, 45-64
- Lowndes, V. (2006). "It's Not What You've Got, But What You Do With It: Women, Social Capital, and Political Participation", in O'Neill, B., and Gidengil, E. (2006) (eds.), *Gender and Social Capital*. Oxon: Routledge, 213-240
- Lugones, M., Spelman, E. (1983). "Have we got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism, and the demand for the women's voice", *Women's Studies International Forum* 6:6, 573-81
- Lynch, C. (2008). "Reflexivity in Research on Civil Society: Constructivist Perspectives", *International Studies Review* 10:4, 708-721
- Lynch, S. (2012). *Women: Your Community – Your Role. Have Your Say! Summary of Roundtable Discussions*. Belfast: The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and National Women's Council of Ireland

- Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach*. Amherst, MA: The Centre for International Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts
- Maguire, P. (2006). "Uneven Ground: Feminisms and Action research", in Reason, P., and Bradbury, H. (eds.), *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage, 60-71
- Manchanda, R. (ed.) (2001). *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*. New Delhi: Sage
- Mason, S., and Clemans, S. (2008). "Participatory Research for Rape Survivor Groups: A Model for Practice", *Affilia* 23:1, 66-76
- McAdam, D., Sampson, R. J., Weffer, S., and MacIndoe, H. (2005). 'There will be Fighting in the Streets': the distorting lens of social movement theory', *Mobilization* 10:1, 1-18
- McCall, C., and Williamson, A. (2001). "Governance and Democracy in Northern Ireland: The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector after the Agreement", *Governance* 14:3, 363-383
- McCartney, C. (1995). "The Liberal Dilemma: Challenging and respecting the hearts and minds of the community" in O'Day, A. (ed.), *Terrorism's Laboratory: the case of Northern Ireland*. Aldershot: Dartmouth
- McCartney, C. (1999). *Striking a Balance: The Northern Ireland Peace Process*. Accord: Conciliation Resources
- McDonough, R. (1996). "Independence or Integration?", in Fearon, K. (ed.), "Power, Politics, Positionings: Women in Northern Ireland", *Democratic Dialogue* 4. Retrieved from, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/report4/report4c.htm#integration>
- McDowell, S. (2008). "Commemorating dead 'men': gendering the past and present in post-conflict Northern Ireland", *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 15:4, 335-354
- McVeigh, R. (2002). "Between reconciliation and pacification: The British state and community relations in the North of Ireland" *Community Development Journal* 37:1, 47-58
- McWilliams, M. (1995). "Struggling for Peace and Justice: Reflections on Women's Activism in Northern Ireland". *Journal of Women's History* 6:4, 13-39
- McWilliams, M. (2010). "From Peace Talks to Gender Justice", *Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, Distinguished Lecture Series*
- Meehan, E. (2000). " 'Britain's Irish Question: Britain's European Question?' British-Irish relations in the context of European Union and The Belfast Agreement", *Review of International Studies* 26:1, 83-97

Meehan, E. (2003). "From Government to Governance, Civic Participation and 'New Politics'; the Context of Potential Opportunities for the Better Representation of Women", *Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics: Queen's University Belfast*, Occasional Paper No.5, 1-22

Ministry of Justice. (2012). *The UK's Universal Periodic Review – Annex Document, September*. London: Ministry of Justice

Molyneux, M. (2002). "Gender and the Silences of Social Capital: Lessons from Latin America", *Development and Change* 33:2, 167 – 188

Morison, J. (2000). "The Government-Voluntary Sector Compacts: Governance, Governmentality, and Civil Society", *Journal of Law and Society* 27:1, 98-132

Morris, A. (2000). "Reflections on Social Movement Theory: Criticisms and Proposals", *Contemporary Sociology* 29:3, 445-454

Morrow, D. (2006). "Sustainability in a Divided Society: applying social capital theory to Northern Ireland", *Shared Space* 2, 63-79

Mowlam, M. (2002). *Momentum: The Struggle for Peace, Politics and the People*. London: Hodder and Stoughton

Murphy, E. (2012). *Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry: The Implementation of Universal Credit*. Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper. Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly

Murtagh, C. (2008). "A Transient Transition: The Cultural and Institutional Obstacles Impeding the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition in its Progression from Informal to Formal Politics", *Irish Political Studies* 23:1, 21-40

Ni Aoláin, F. (2003). "Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women: Northern Ireland Case Study", *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women* EGM/PEACE/2003/EP.4

Norris, P., and Inglehart, R. (2003). *Gendering Social Capital: Bowling in Women's Leagues?* Paper delivered at the Gender and Social Capital conference, University of Manitoba, 1-27. Retrieved from, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Gendering%20Social%20Capital.pdf>

Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on UNSCR 1325 (NIA APG 1325). (2014). *Submission to the Consultation on Irish NAP on Women, Peace and Security*

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). (2011). *Our Vision is of...a Sustainable Sector*. Retrieved 15 May 2012 from <http://www.nicva.org/policy-manifesto-2011/sustainable-sector>

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). (2012). *A Review of PEACE III and Considerations for PEACE IV*. Belfast: NICVA

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) (date unknown). *Response to EU Communication on Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform*. Belfast: NIRWN

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC). (1998). *A New Voice for New Times*, Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto. Retrieved from [www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/issies/politics/docs/niwc/niwc98.htm](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/issies/politics/docs/niwc/niwc98.htm)

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP). (2008). *Shadow Report: Submission to the Committee on the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*. Belfast: NIWEP

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP). (2012). *Submission on the list of issues for the CEDAW Committee pre-sessional working group meeting, October 2012 Geneva*

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP). (2013a). *Submission to the Committee on the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Seventh Periodic Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Shadow Report Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, December 2013*. Belfast: NIWEP

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP). (2013b). *Recommendations for Concluding Observations – Issues relating to Northern Ireland*

Norwood, G., and Zahau, C. (2011). "Fostering a Grassroots Women's Movement through Feminist Leadership on the Burma-India Border", *Women and Therapy* 34:3, 223–241

Oakley, A. (1981). "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms?", in Roberts, H., (ed.). *Doing Feminist Research*. London: Routledge, 30-61

O'Dowd, L., and McCall, C. (2008). "Escaping the Cage of Ethno-National Conflict in Northern Ireland? The Importance of Transnational Networks", *Ethnopolitics* 7:1, 81-99

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2005). *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: OFMDFM

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2006a). *Social Capital in Northern Ireland: An Analysis of the 2003/04 Continuous Household Survey*. Belfast: OFMDFM

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2006b). "Encouraging Women into political and public life", *Report on the Conference in Hillsborough Castle*. Retrieved from <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/women-in-political-and-public-life-conference-3.pdf>



Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2008). *Gender Equality Strategy: A Baseline Picture*. Belfast: OFMDFM

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2010). *The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Consultation Document*. Belfast: OFMDFM

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2013a). AQO 3349/11-15 in *Assembly Questions and Answers*: February 2013

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2013b). *Together: Building a United Community*. Belfast: OFMDFM

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2013c). *Central Good Relations Funding Programme 2014/2015: Guidance Notes*. Retrieved from, <http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/central-good-relations-fund-2014-2015-guidance-notes-february-2014.pdf>

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (2013d). *Together: Building a United Community. Equality Impact Assessment*. Retrieved from <http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community-section-75-eqia-screening-form.pdf>

O'Neill, B., and Gidengil, E. (eds.) (2006). *Gender and Social Capital*. Oxon: Routledge

Opsahl, T. (1993). *A Citizens' inquiry: the Opsahl report on Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Lilliput Press

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2001). *The Wellbeing of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital*, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. Paris: OECD

O'Rourke, C. (2013). Speaking at UK WILPF Autumn Seminar - '*UNSCR 1325: Global Ambitions and Local Reflections from (Northern) Ireland*'. 27 October, London

Osborne, S., and McLaughlin, K. (2002). "Trends and Issues in the Implementation of Local 'Voluntary Sector Compacts' in England", *Public Money and Management* 22:1, 55-64

Osborne, S., and McLaughlin, K. (2004). "The cross-cutting review of the voluntary sector: where next for local government - voluntary sector relationships?", *Regional Studies* 38:5, 573 - 582

O'Shea, B. (2005). "Women and the Implementation of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement", *Transitional Justice Institute Working Report*, 1-80

- Pankhurst, D. (2004). "The 'sex war' and other wars: towards a feminist approach to peace building", in Afshar, H., and Eade, D. (eds.), *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives*. Oxfam GB, 8-42
- Pattie, C., and Johnston, R. (2011). "How Big is the Big Society?", *Parliamentary Affairs* 64:3, 403-424
- Pedwell, C. (2008). *Just Politics: Women Transforming Political Spaces*. One World Action
- Phillips, A. (1995). *The Politics of Presence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Phillips, A. (2002). "Does Feminism Need a Concept of Civil Society?" in Chambers, S., and Kymlicka, W. (eds.), *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*. Princeton: University Press, 71-89
- Pickering, S. (2000). "Women, the Home and Resistance in Northern Ireland", *Women & Criminal Justice* 11:3, 49-82
- Policy Group. (2002). *Notes from Policy Group Discussion held at WSN on 11<sup>th</sup> January 02*
- Purdue, D. (2001). "Neighbourhood Governance: Leadership, Trust and Social Capital", *Urban Studies* 38:12, 2211-2224
- Putnam, R. (1995). "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital", *Journal of Democracy* 6:1, 65-78
- Randall, V. (2002). 'Feminism', in Marsh, D., and Stoker, G. (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 114-135
- Reid, C., Tom, A., and Frisby, W. (2006). "Finding the 'action' in feminist participatory action research", *Action Research* 4:3, 315-332
- Ridden, J. (2001). " 'The Lessons of Community Politics': The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the Peace Process" in Richardson, E. (ed.), *Taking the Initiative: Women's Leadership on National Issues*. Centre for Women Leaders Working Papers, 103-118
- Riordan, S. (2000). " 'Put your money where your mouth is!': the need for public investment in women's organisations", *Gender and Development* 8:1, 63-70
- Rooney, E. (1995). "Political Division, Practical Alliance: Problems for Women in Conflict", *Journal of Women's History* 6:4, 40-48
- Rooney, E. (2002). "Community Development in Times of Trouble: Reflections on the community women's sector in the north of Ireland", *Community Development Journal* 37:1, 33-46

- Rooney, E. (2006). "Women's equality in Northern Ireland's transition: intersectionality in theory and place", *Feminist Legal Studies* 14:3, 353-375
- Roulston, C. (1997). "Gender, Nation, Class: The Politics of Difference in Northern Ireland", *Scottish Affairs* 18, 54-68
- Roulston, C., and Davies, C. (2000). *Gender, Democracy and Inclusion in Northern Ireland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Ruane, J., and Todd, J. (2001). "The Politics of Transition? Explaining Political Crises in the Implementation of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement", *Political Studies* 49:5, 923-940
- Rusaw, C. (2005). "A Proposed Model of Feminist Public Sector Leadership", *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 27:2, 385-393
- Russell, H. (1999). "Friends in Low Places: Gender, Unemployment and Sociability", *Work, Employment, Society* 13:2, 205-224
- Rynder, C. (2002). "The Origins and Early Year of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition", *New Hibernia Review* 6:1, 44-58
- Sales, R. (1997). *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*. London: Routledge
- Sapiro, V. (2006). "Gender, Social Capital, and Politics", in O'Neill, B., and Gidengil, E. (eds.) *Gender and Social Capital*. Oxon: Routledge, 151-184
- Sawer, M. (1996). "Femocrats and Ecorats: Women's Policy Machinery in Australia, Canada and New Zealand", *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*. Occasional Paper 6, i-34
- Sawer, M. (2007). "Australia: the Fall of the Femocrat", in Outshoorn, J., and Kantola, J. (eds.), *Changing State Feminism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 20-40
- Sawer, M. (2010). "Premature Obituaries: How Can We Tell If the Women's Movement Is Over?", *Politics and Gender* 6:4, 602-609
- Sawer, M., and Jupp, J. (1996). "The Two-way Street: Government Shaping of Community-Based Advocacy", *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 55:4, 82-99
- Sharoni, S. (2001). "Rethinking Women's Struggles in Israel-Palestine and in the North of Ireland", in Moser, C., and Clark, F. (eds.), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London: Zed Books, 85-98
- Side, K. (2005). "Snapshot on Identity: Women's contributions addressing community relations in a rural Northern Irish district", *Women's Studies International Forum* 28:4, 315- 327

- Side, K. (2006). "Picture Politics: Women's Efforts to Address Sectarianism in Rural Northern Ireland", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 32:1, 22-31
- Side, K. (2009). "Women's Civil and Political Citizenship in the Post-Good Friday Agreement Period in Northern Ireland", *Irish Political Studies* 24:1, 67-87
- Sørensen, B. (1998). *Women and Post-Conflict Resolution: Issues and Sources*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. WSP Occasional Paper No. 3, i-88
- Sperling, L. (1998). "Public Services, Quangos and Women: A Concern for Local Government", *Public Administration* 76:3, 471-487
- Stacey, J. (1988). "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?", *Women's Studies International Forum* 11:1, 21-27
- Staeheli, L., and Lawson, V. (1994). "A Discussion of 'Women in the Field': The Politics of Feminist Fieldwork", *The Professional Geographer* 46: 1, 96-102
- Stall, S. and Stoecker, R. (1998). "Community Organising or Organising Community? Gender and the Crafts of Empowerment", *Gender and Society* 12:6, 729-756
- Stanley, L. (1990). "Feminist praxis and the academic mode of production: an editorial introduction", in Stanley, L. (ed.), *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*, London: Routledge, 3-19
- Strickland, R., and Duvvury, N. (2003). *Gender Equity and Peacebuilding: From Rhetoric to Reality: Finding the Way*. International Center for Research on Women
- Strid, S. (2009). *Gendered Interests in the European Union: The European Women's Lobby and the Organisation and Representation of Women's Interests*. Örebro Studies in Gender Research 1: Örebro University
- Taylor, V. (1998). "Feminist Methodology in Social Movements Research", *Qualitative Sociology* 21:4, 357-379
- Taylor, V. (1999). "Gender and Social Movements: Gender Processes in Women's Self-Help Movements", *Gender and Society* 13:1, 8-33
- Teorell, J. (2003). "Linking Social Capital to Political Participation: Voluntary Associations and Networks of Recruitment in Sweden", *Scandinavian Political Studies* 26:1, 49-66
- Tickner, J. (2005). "What is your research program? Some feminist answers to International Relations methodological questions", *International Studies Quarterly* 49:1, 1-21

Tickner, J. (2006). "Feminism Meets International Relations: some new methodological issues", in Ackerly, B., Stern, M., and True, J. (eds.), *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*. Cambridge University Press, 19-41

Training for Women Network (TWN) (2014). *Women's Regional Consortium: Working to Support Women in Rural Communities and Disadvantaged Urban Areas*. Retrieved 14 October 2014 from <http://www.twnonline.com/current-projects/womens-consortium>

Tremblay, M. (2000). "Women, Citizenship and representation: an introduction", *International Political Science Review* 21:4, 339-343

Tremblay, M., and Pelletier, R. (2000). "More Feminists or More Women?: Descriptive and Substantive Representations of Women in the 1997 Canadian Federal Elections", *International Political Science Review* 21: 4, 381-405

UK Joint Committee on Women (UKJCW). (2012). *UK Joint Committee on Women response to the European Women's Lobby consultation on 2012 NRP engagement*

UK NGO CSW Alliance. (2014). *UK Women: Rights and Progress. Beijing +20*. London: NAWO

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (2008). *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 10 July 2008, CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (2012). *List of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of periodic reports: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 25 October 2012, CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/7

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (2013). *Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 30 July 2013, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). (2002). *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building*. New York: UNIFEM

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2013). *Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women meets with NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions*, Retrieved 28 April 2014 from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13541&LangID=E>

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2014). *Special Rapporteur on violence against women finalizes country mission to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and calls for urgent action to address the accountability deficit and also the adverse impacts of changes in funding and services* Retrieved 28 April 2014 from

United Nations Security Council. (2000). *Resolution 1325: Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000*

Ward, M. (2005). *Women's Equality: International Standards and Local Strategies*. Belfast: Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group

Ward, M. (2013, 2 December). "Excluded and silenced: Women in Northern Ireland after the peace process", *Open Democracy* [Online]. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/margaret-ward/excluded-and-silenced-women-in-northern-ireland-after-peace-process>

Waylen, G. (1994). "Women and Democratisation: Conceptualising Gender Relations in Transition Politics", *World Politics* 46:3, 327-354

Whitaker, R. (2004). "Where Difference Lies: Democracy and the Ethnographic Imagination in Northern Ireland", in Finlay, A., (ed.), *Nationalism and Multiculturalism: Irish Identity, Citizenship and the Peace Process*, Munster: LIT Verlag, 157-182

Whitaker, R. (2008). "Writing As A Citizen? Some Thoughts on the Uses of Dilemmas", *Critique of Anthropology* 28:3, 321 – 338

Whitaker, R. (2011). "The Politics of Friendship in Feminist Anthropology", *Anthropology in Action* 18:1, 56-66

Wilford, R., Miller, R., Bell, Y., and Donoghue, F. (1993). "In their own voices: Women councillors in Northern Ireland", *Public Administration* 71:3, 341-355

Wilford, R. (1996). "Women and Politics in Northern Ireland", *Parliamentary Affairs* 49:1, 41-54

Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group. (2002). *Minutes of meeting held on 18.4.2002 at WSN*

Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group. (2010). *Bill of Rights Consultation*. Belfast: WRDA

Women's Ad Hoc Policy Group. (2011). *Women's Manifesto: Elections 2011 – Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government*

Women's Aid Northern Ireland. (2013). *Briefing paper on the Trafficking & Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill*. Belfast: Women's Aid Northern Ireland

Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP). (2009). *Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*. Belfast: WCRP

Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP). (2012). *Consultation Response to the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/draft-pfg-2011-2015-consultation-responses-w.pdf>

Women's National Commission (WNC). (2009). *Letter from WNC Chair Baroness Joyce Gould to Parliamentary Under Secretary for the UN, Henry Bellingham MP*, 10 April

Women's National Commission (WNC). (2010a). *Email from WNC Northern Ireland Commissioner Bronagh Hinds to Northern Ireland WNC partners regarding the WNC's abolition*, 27 September

Women's National Commission (WNC). (2010b). *WNC Legacy Document: Bronagh Hinds Notes and Points*, 20 December

Women's National Commission (WNC). (2010c). *Letter from WNC Chair Baroness Joyce Gould regarding a submission to the CEDAW Committee seeking an inquiry into the provision of abortion services in Northern Ireland under the Optional Protocol provision*, 21 December

Women's National Commission (WNC). (2010d). *WNC Advisory Forum: Europe and Commonwealth Group Minutes and Action Points*, 1 July

Women's National Commission (WNC). (2010e). *WNC Advisory Forum: UN Group Minutes and Action Points*, 1 July

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). (2005). Position Paper, "Proposed Infrastructure of the Women's Sector". Retrieved from, [www.wrda.net/Position%20Paper%20re%20Infrastructure%20July%2005.pdf](http://www.wrda.net/Position%20Paper%20re%20Infrastructure%20July%2005.pdf)

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). (2007). *Is gender part of good relations? Report of a conference on A Shared Future organised by the Women's Resource and development Agency*. Belfast: WRDA

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). (2011). *Briefing on Status of UNSCR 1325*

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). (2013). Response to the 'Transparency, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill'

Women's Resource Centre (WRC). (2013). *UK CEDAW Shadow Report*. London: WRC

Women's Support Network (WSN). (2010). *A Response to: Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration*. Belfast: WSN

Woolcock, M. (2001). "The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes", *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, Spring, 1-35

Young, I. (1997). *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage

Yuval-Davis, N. (1999). "What is 'Transversal Politics'?", *Soundings* 12, 94-98

Zalewski, M. (2006). "Intervening in Northern Ireland: Critically re-thinking representations of the conflict", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9:4, 479-497

Zuckerman, E., and Greenberg, M. (2004). "The gender dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction: An analytical framework for policymakers". *Gender and Development* 12:3, 70-82



## **Appendix**

### **List of Interviews**

*The following list includes the names of people that I interviewed in Northern Ireland between 2011 and 2013. Full transcripts of each interview were produced.*

#### **Belfast Feminist Network (four members)**

Interview date: 8 July 2011  
Interview location: Queens University Belfast, University Road, Belfast

#### **Carvill, Lynn**

Role at the time of interview: Women's Sector Lobbyist, WRDA  
Interview date: 22 June 2011 and 27 November 2012  
Interview location: WRDA office, 6 Mount Charles, Belfast

#### **Gray, Ann Marie**

Role at the time of interview: NIWEP Committee member and Senior Lecturer, University of Ulster  
Interview date: 27 November 2012  
Interview location: Cafe Renoir, Botanic Avenue, Belfast

#### **Haren, Patricia**

Role at the time of interview: Director, WSN  
Interview date: 5 July 2011  
Interview location: WSN office, 109 Royal Avenue, Belfast

#### **Hinds, Bronagh**

Role at the time of interview: Director, DemocraShe  
Former member of Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, former Commissioner on the WNC  
Interview date: 28 June 2011  
Interview location: Clemants Coffee Shop, Botanic Avenue, Belfast

#### **Hope, Ann**

Role at the time of interview: Commissioner for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission  
Former member of Northern Ireland Women's Coalition  
Interview date: 28 June 2011  
Interview location: Clemants Coffee Shop, Botanic Avenue, Belfast

#### **Kilmurray, Avila**

Role at the time of interview: Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Co-founder and former member of Northern Ireland Women's Coalition  
Interview date: 18 July 2011  
Interview location: CFNI office, Albert Street, Belfast

**Law, Liz**

Role at the time of interview: NIWEP Committee member and EWL Board member  
Policy Officer, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland  
Interview date: 21 June 2011 and 6 July 2011  
Interview location: Equality House, Shaftesbury Square, Belfast

**McCullough, Kate**

Role at the time of interview: NIWEP Chair  
Interview date: 21 June 2011 and 10 December 2013  
Interview location: Equality House, Belfast and Northern Ireland Assembly, Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Belfast

**McWilliams, Monica**

Role at the time of interview: Chief Commissioner, Human Rights Commission  
Co-founder and former MLA, Northern Ireland Women's Coalition  
Interview date: 26 November 2012  
Interview location: University of Ulster, Jordanstown campus, Co. Antrim

**Patterson-Bennett, Emma**

Role at the time of interview: NIWEP Committee member until 2013; NIWEP Coordinator 2013-2014  
Interview date: 28 November 2012 and 10 December 2013  
Interview location: Costa Coffee, Belfast and Connsbrook Drive, Belfast

**Sung, Eileen**

Role at the time of interview: Head of Gender and Sexual Orientation Equality at OFMDFM  
Interview date: 28 June 2011  
Interview location: WRDA office, 6 Mount Charles, Belfast

**Ward, Margaret**

Role at the time of interview: Director, WRDA  
Interview date: 28 June 2011 and 30 November 2012  
Interview location: WRDA office, 6 Mount Charles, Belfast

**Wilde, Jane**

Role at the time of interview:

Former chief executive of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland  
Former member of Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

Interview date:

22 June 2011

Interview location:

Ballycoan Road, Belfast